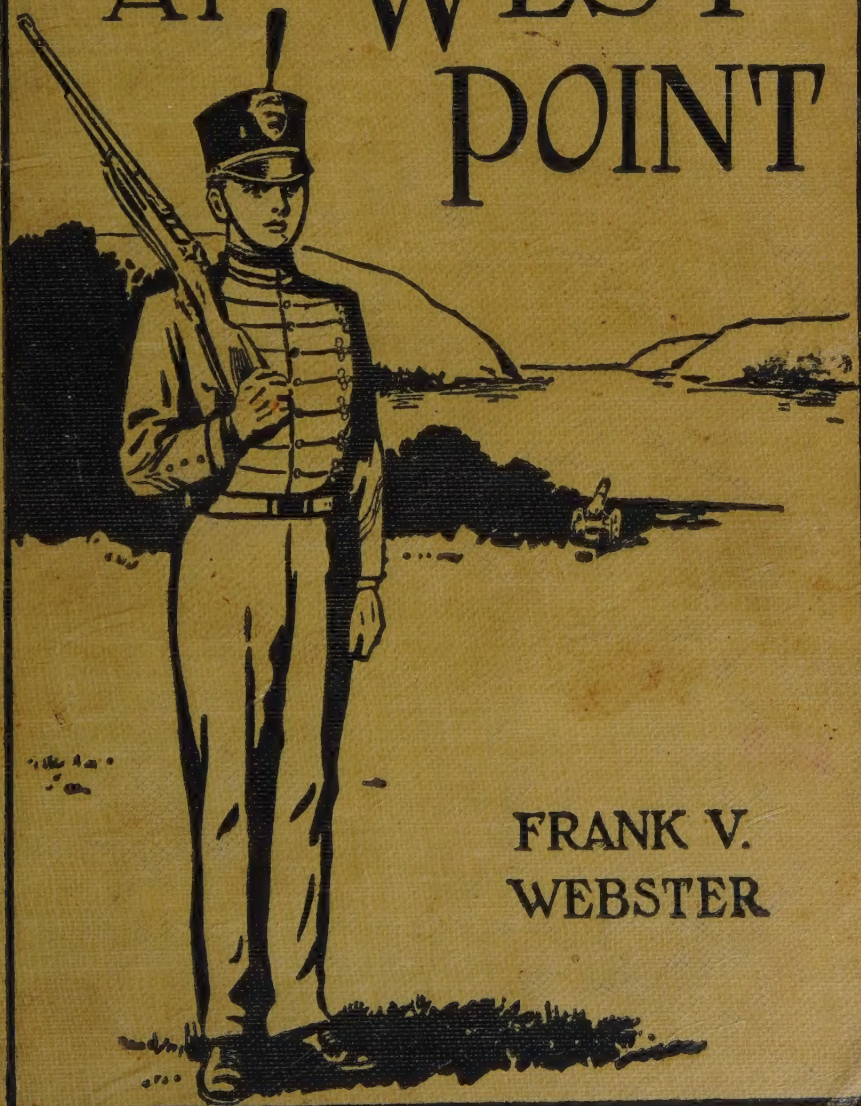


TOM TAYLOR AT WEST POINT



FRANK V.
WEBSTER

Dec. 25, 1929.

Victor Lockwood.

From.

Aunt Irene ^{and} Uncle Addison.



TOM AND HIS FELLOW RIDERS WOULD RAISE THEIR SABERS
HIGH IN THE AIR AND YELL.

Tom Taylor at West Point.

Page 202.

TOM TAYLOR AT WEST POINT

Or

The Old Army Officer's Secret

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

**AUTHOR OF "ONLY A FARM BOY," "BOB THE CASTAWAY," "AIR-
SHIP ANDY," DARRY, THE LIFE-SAVER," ETC.**

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TOM TAYLOR AT WEST POINT

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TOM TAYLOR AT WEST POINT

CHAPTER I

WONDERFUL NEWS

TOM TAYLOR, a well set up, pleasant-faced lad of about sixteen, came marching up the path that led from the street to the front door of the cottage. Tom was whistling a cheerful air; no—one moment—the tune was cheerful enough, but Tom Taylor was whistling it in anything but a gay manner.

Something in the way that he trilled out the notes must have impressed his mother, for she looked up quickly, and out of the open window near which she was sewing.

“Why, Tom!” she exclaimed, “you’re home early; aren’t you? I hope——”

There was an anxious note in her voice, and an extra trace of worry showed in her face, already lined with marks of care.

“Yes, I am home a bit early, Mother. I’m taking a sort of vacation you see. Came home to get you to go for a walk. It’s too soon for supper. Come on, we’ll walk over to the woods,”

and once again Tom tried to put some gaiety into the tune he was whistling.

Mrs. Taylor shook her head.

"That isn't the reason you came home so early, Tom," she said, gently. "I know something has happened. Tell me!"

"It isn't anything at all, Mother, really! Come on, we'll go for a little walk, and then, when we come back, I'll help you get supper. Come along."

Again Mrs. Taylor shook her head.

"I'd like to come with you, Tom, you know that," she said, "but I must finish this dress. Mrs. Leighton wants it to wear to-morrow, and if it isn't done I'll not get paid for it, and you know the interest is soon due. We must meet that."

"Yes, I know," and a frown passed over the lad's face. "I wonder who invented interest, anyhow. It always comes at such an inconvenient time. Well, here's something toward it, Mother," and he took from his pocket a few bills and some change in silver.

"Oh, Tom! To-night isn't pay night!" his mother exclaimed.

"It was—for me," he said, and this time he smiled, for he saw a look of alarm, and almost of fear, come over his mother's face, and he wanted to be as reassuring as possible.

"Why, Tom—Tom! if Mr. Blackford paid you, then——"

"Then it's pretty good evidence, Mother, that I earned the money!" finished Tom with a laugh. "You don't often catch Mr. Blackford paying for something he hasn't had. I certainly earned this!"

Tom sighed in memory of the long hours of hard work he had given in exchange for that small amount of money.

"But why should he pay you ahead of time, Tom?"

"Because, Mother, there isn't going to be any more time for me at Mr. Blackford's store—that is not right away. I'm through—paid off, as it were."

"Oh, Tom! I hope you didn't have a quarrel with him!"

"Not in the least, Mother. It was a plain business proposition. He said he couldn't afford to hire me after school any more to do some of his errands, and help straighten out the stock. So he paid me what he owed me, and here I am."

"I quit an hour earlier, you see, though I didn't lose anything by it, and I thought maybe you'd come for a walk."

"I'd like to, Tom, but really I must finish this dress. Oh, I'm so sorry Mr. Blackford couldn't keep you."

"So am I, Mother, particularly as we need the money. But I think I can find something else to do. Business is picking up a little. I'm going to be on the lookout. Something is sure to turn up. And I do hope it will be something worth while, so I can, by some means or other, get enough ahead to go to West Point."

"You haven't forgotten your ambition I see, Tom," said his mother, as she vigorously plied her needle, taking advantage of the last hours of daylight.

"Forgotten it, Mother? Indeed I haven't! I never shall. I intend to go to West Point, and become an army officer."

Tom straightened himself up as he said this, as though he had heard the command:

"Attention!"

But the only sound that came to the ears of his mother and himself was the distant hum and roar of the little city, on the outskirts of which they lived.

Mrs. Taylor sighed. Tom was folding the bills into a neat little package, enclosing within the silver coins. It was a small sum, but it represented much to him and his widowed mother.

"I don't like to think of you being a soldier, Tom," said Mrs. Taylor, as she stopped to thread a needle.

"Well, I guess there isn't very much danger," Tom laughed. "There aren't, at present, any vacancies from this congressional district so I understand, and the appointments at large have all been filled. And even if there was a chance for me to get in, I couldn't do it I guess. It takes about a hundred dollars to start with, but, of course, after that Uncle Sam looks out for you. But I sure would like to go!"

Tom's eyes sparkled, and again he half unconsciously straightened up, as stiff as the proverbial ramrod.

"I wish you could have your wish, Tom," his mother said, softly; "but I can't bear to think of war. It is so cruel!"

"Oh, just because I want to go to West Point, and become an army officer, doesn't mean there'll be war, Mother. In fact, war is ceasing to be the custom. But the best way not to have a war, is to be in the finest possible shape to meet it if it does come."

"I can't bear to think of it, Tom. The shooting—the killing! Oh, it's terrible!"

"But the United States Army does a lot of things besides shooting and killing," Tom said. "Look at the officers and men—see what they've done in the Panama Canal zone. Why, in spite of the fact that they're trained in the arts of war,

they have, of late, been using their special knowledge in the interests of peace. I certainly would give anything for the chance to go to West Point. But there! No use thinking about it!"

Tom seemed to blow the matter away as though it were some trifle, light as air, and he assumed a manner of indifference that he did not altogether feel.

"Come on, Mother," he begged, tossing the money into her lap through the open window. "Take a half-hour off. You'll be all the better for it. You haven't been eating well lately. A walk to the woods will give you an appetite."

"I believe I will go with you, Tom," she said, with sudden decision. "I can finish this dress after supper, but it must be delivered, and——"

"I'll take it over," said the lad. "I haven't many lessons to-night."

A little later mother and son were walking across the field that lay between their cottage and a little patch of wood in the cool and shady depths of which they were wont often to stroll.

Mrs. Taylor was the widow of Charles Taylor, who was once well-to-do. He had lost his fortune in unfortunate speculation, however, and the shock and disappointment of this, coupled with a not too strong constitution, caused his death when Tom was about twelve years old.

From the wreck of her husband's estate Mrs.

Taylor received a small income, and she and Tom, moving from the well-appointed house in the best residential section of the small city of Chester, took up their abode in a small cottage, once owned by Mr. Taylor, but now mortgaged to a Mr. Aaron Doolittle, who had, in some unexplained manner, become possessed of much of Mr. Taylor's former property.

The crash resulting in the sweeping away of the money, and the death of her husband, had almost stunned the young widow. But she rallied, and bravely took up the battle of life.

Mrs. Taylor was an expert needlewoman, and some of her former friends kept her well supplied with work. She managed, with a small income from some investments her husband had made before the crash, to keep Tom at his studies, and, eventually, he went to the high school, where he was in attendance when our story opens.

It did not take Tom long to realize that he was every day becoming more and more of an expense to his widowed mother. His clothes never seemed to wear very well. There were certain books and other materials to buy, that he might keep up his school work. And his appetite was not a small one.

He saw the need of more money, and resolved to earn it himself after school hours. He se-

cured a place in the grocery of Mr. Blackford, and by delivering orders, helping to keep the stock in order, and doing the hundred and one things that always can be done about a grocery, he managed to add a few dollars to the weekly income.

But now, owing, as Mr. Blackford had alleged, to a desire on his part to save money, he had told Tom his services would no longer be required.

"Though I'll wager he's found some one who will do it more cheaply than I did," declared Tom. "Well, he won't get any one to do it any better, that's sure. I'm going to see Wendell to-morrow, after school. He may need a boy in his store."

"Oh, Tom, they say he's mean and cruel. No one likes to work for him," objected Mrs. Taylor.

"Beggars can't be choosers," replied the lad, laughing. "I don't mind hard work. I'd have to work hard if I went to West Point."

His mother smiled. She did wish her fine-looking son could have his wish, but it seemed out of the question. In silence the two strolled on through the wood, to the far edge.

There, standing amid the trees, they could look across a narrow valley to where a railroad embankment wound its way along the shore of a small river. In the distance could be seen a

large bridge, and, crossing the river on this, the S. & C. V. Railroad entered the village of Preston.

The railway only touched the outskirts of Chester, but the line was near the center of Preston, which acquired importance from the fact that the county court house was located there.

"Well, if we had some of the money that was sunk around the piers of that bridge," said Tom reflectively, "our worries would be over, Mother!"

"Yes," she agreed, as Tom waved his hand toward the railroad structure, "but there's no use talking or thinking about that, Tom. It's past and gone, and the money has disappeared."

"It disappeared all right enough," and Tom's tone was the least bit menacing. "But I'm not so sure that it disappeared fairly and honestly. If it had sunk in a bed of quicksand it couldn't have vanished any more completely. But between old Doolittle, the railroad lawyers and some others—"

"Oh, Tom, please don't bring up that old dispute!" begged his mother. "You know it can't do any good."

"No, I suppose not," he admitted. "But it certainly is hard luck to look at what you think ought to be yours, and know that some one else is enjoying the benefit of it," and Tom shook his

finger at the big railroad bridge, as if that structure of steel were, in some way, responsible for the unpleasant circumstances of his mother and himself.

The railroad bridge, or, rather, one of the ends and the approach, was located on land that had formed a part of Mr. Taylor's estate. The land had always been considered valuable, and when the railroad went through the value of that property, as well as of other land near it, rose rapidly.

Then came Mr. Taylor's death, and his widow, instead of receiving what she hoped for—a large sum from the sale of the bridge site to the railway people—received nothing at all. Inquiry developed the fact that certain creditors of Mr. Taylor's, including a Mr. Aaron Doolittle and a Captain Cason Hawkesbury, held a claim on the bridge land, and they received the money for it from the railroad.

But, as Mrs. Taylor said, that was past and gone, though Tom could not forget it. There was always resentment in his heart, for he believed his mother should have received something for her rights. But they were not able to hire competent lawyers, and the young member of the bar who wound up the affairs of Mr. Taylor's estate did not seem to think there was a chance of getting anything by litigation over the bridge property.

"We must go back, Tom," said his mother finally. "I've enjoyed the little walk, and I feel better for it. But I must get that dress done, and I'm sure you are hungry."

"Well, I don't mind admitting that I am," he said, with a final look at the bridge, over which, at that moment, an express train was rumbling.

"Going right over our property as if it had a right!" grumbled Tom.

"But they have a right, son," his mother said gently. "Don't brood over that any more."

Tom might have done so, in spite of her request, but for something that happened shortly after that. They were walking down the side street toward their cottage, when a boy with a bundle of papers under his arm, came along.

"Will you take yours now, Mrs. Taylor, or shall I leave it at the house?" he asked, touching his cap and smiling.

"I'll take it," said Tom. "I forgot the *Banner* came out to-day. Wonder if they have a good account of our baseball game."

The *Banner* was the weekly paper issued in Chester, and Mrs. Taylor subscribed to it. Tom took the sheet from the delivery boy, and rapidly scanned the front page.

"Yes," he said, "here's a big account of the game. And here—Say, Mother! Look here!" he exclaimed, holding the paper up in front of her, and pointing out a certain item. "There's

going to be a competitive examination for a West Point cadetship! It's going to take place in Preston in two weeks. It's open to all the lads around here. Congressman Hutton has an appointment to make, and he's going to let it go to the fellow who gets the best standing.

"Say, this is great! Wonderful! Mother, I'm going to have a try for that! A vacancy has unexpectedly occurred, it says. It's my chance, Mother! It's my chance!"

CHAPTER II

THE EXAMINATION

TOM TAYLOR was really quite excited. He strode along the street quickly, fluttering the paper containing the wonderful news, until finally Mrs. Taylor was obliged to call out:

"Tom, dear! You seem to forget that I haven't my seven-league boots on. I can't keep up with you," and she laughed, though there was a worried look in her eyes.

"That's so, Mother! I beg your pardon," Tom said. "I forgot about everything except this chance. Say! it's great; isn't it?" and he looked at his mother with shining eyes.

"Are you really going to attempt it?" she asked softly.

"Why, yes, of course," Tom said, quickly. "Why not?"

"Do you think you can pass, Tom?"

"Well, I'm not absolutely sure of it, of course. No one is. But I think I can pass the preliminary physical test, and that will admit me to the

written examination. I've been making some inquiries about that, and there isn't any subject that we haven't had in our high school work. I may be a bit rusty on certain things, but I'm going to bone up on them. I've got a week or more."

"And if you pass this examination that is to be held at Preston, does that mean you'll become a cadet?" asked his mother.

"No, it doesn't, worse luck!" Tom exclaimed, with a rueful laugh. "But if I come out ahead in this preliminary examination, and get the appointment from Congressman Hutton, it means that I have a chance to go to West Point, and have a try there. And there's where it will be pretty stiff, I imagine."

"Oh, Tom, I—I hope you get it," his mother murmured.

"Ho, ho! Thought you didn't want to see me in the army?"

"Well, I don't want to see you go to war," his mother said gently. "But if it is your ambition to become a West Pointer, and if, as you say, there is a chance to do good work outside of shooting and killing, why, I shall not oppose you. Now let's hurry home. I must get the dress finished, West Point or not," and she smiled.

Tom walked beside her, reading over and over

again the notice of the examination soon to be held. In brief it was a statement from the congressman of that district to the effect, that, as he had a chance to name a youth to go to West Point, he had decided to throw the chance open to all the eligible lads of his district. They were to report at the Preston Court House on a certain day.

"And I'll be there!" exclaimed Tom. "But I say though—hold on. There's something I almost forgot!" and a shade of annoyance passed over his face.

"What is it, Tom?" asked his mother, as they neared the cottage.

"I have to have a hundred dollars, Mother."

"A hundred dollars, Tom! What for?"

"To deposit at West Point,—that is if I get the permanent appointment," he explained. "It's a sort of guarantee to cover preliminary cost of equipment, and so on. I almost forgot that. A hundred dollars! It's a pile of money!"

"But you don't need it right away; do you?"

"No, not until June, when I'll have to report at the Military Academy in case I'm successful. But—"

"Well, don't worry about that part of it—at least not now," said his mother. "When the time comes I may find a way to get it. I don't

want to see you lose this chance. Don't worry about the money or it may spoil your chances for passing the examination. I dare say I shall manage somehow."

"Oh, if you only can, Mother!" and, even though they were out in the street, Tom put his arms around her and kissed her.

"Oh, Tom!" she remonstrated.

"Don't you care!" he cried, gaily. "Nobody saw us, and I don't mind in the least if they did."

Supper was rather an excited meal, and Tom fairly ran home with the dress his mother finished. He was paid, and as he carried back the money he thought:

"It's a shame I can't make more myself. I don't like the idea of taking the money mother earns with her needle to go to West Point with. I sure do want to go, though!"

"But I'll make good!" he declared to himself, "and when I do, and when I'm earning a decent salary, I'll make it all up to mother. She can live with me in barracks, perhaps, and I'll be an engineer in charge of some big work. Say, it sure will be great!"

His mind filled with such rosy dreams of the future as these, Tom hurried around a corner, and ran full tilt into a man advancing from the opposite direction. So hard was the impact that

Tom would have knocked down the man but that he caught hold of him and held him up.

"I beg your pardon!" Tom exclaimed.

"Hey! Heck! Huh—! Huh—! Ahem! Ah!" the man ejaculated, trying to recover the breath that had been driven from his body.

"What do you mean by running into me like that, young man? What do you mean?"

"I beg your pardon— Oh, it's Mr. Doolittle!" Tom exclaimed. "I didn't see you and—"

"Well, you'd better look where you're goin' next time!" was the snappish response. "Oh, it's you, is it?" and he seemed for the first time to recognize Tom. "Might have known," he muttered. "Nobody else would be rushin' around corners like that but you!"

"I hope you're not hurt, Mr. Doolittle!" Tom ventured to say, as he picked up the hat of the man who had succeeded to most of Mr. Taylor's property.

"Hurt? Huh! More by good luck than your efforts if I'm not!" was grunted out. "Is my hat dented?"

"No, it doesn't seem to be hurt a bit," Tom said, as cheerfully as he could. He brushed it off, and Mr. Doolittle placed it on his head.

"Um! Humph!" was all the answer Tom received, and then, muttering to himself, the man

who was counted one of the wealthiest in Chester passed on in the darkness.

"Hope he doesn't tack on an extra charge for interest just because I ran into him," thought Tom, as he kept on. He said nothing to his mother of the encounter as he handed her the money he had brought home for the dress.

When Tom went to school next day he discovered that a number of his classmates had seen the notice about the competitive examination to be held for the West Point cadetship, and several announced their intention to try it. At the suggestion of one of them they decided to learn the line of questioning that would be followed, and to study up on those subjects specially. The school principal heard of their intentions and kindly offered to coach them, which offer was gratefully accepted.

Then began busy days for Tom Taylor. He was well up in his studies, and he had little to fear regarding the physical examination, but there was always the haunting fear lest something should happen. So he studied early and late until the day set for the taking of the examination.

Tom arose early that morning, and with a last final look at his books, and with a kiss from his mother, he set off to take the trolley to Preston. He met several of his chums on the same errand.

The examinations would take all of one day.

and part of the next, and some of those, who came from a distance, had to stop at the Preston Hotel. But Tom could go home at night.

On reaching the court house, where the examinations were to be conducted, Tom found a number of other lads there. Most of them were strangers to him, coming from distant parts of the congressional district.

Congressman Hutton was on hand, personally to direct matters, and three physicians were in attendance to conduct the physical examination. To Tom's delight he went through this successfully, as he had expected. But some of the boys were rejected, and with tears of regret in their eyes they went back home.

Tom came from the room where he had been thumped, pounded, made to read cards at varying distances to test his eyesight, and had had his heart listened to after jumping violently up and down.

"You'll do, young man," the chief physician had said gruffly. "Get your clothes on."

Tom's heart beat high with hope. As he was going out to join the other candidates, some successful thus far, and some not, Tom saw a young man, flashily dressed, standing near a window, smoking a cigarette.

"Better cut that out if you're going in for the exam," suggested a lad near the smoker.

"Oh, I'm not worrying," was the sneering retort. "They can't turn *me* down."

The speaker turned, and Tom saw that he was Clarence Hawkesbury, the nephew of Captain Hawkesbury, who had come into possession of so much of Mr. Taylor's property. Clarence looked at Tom and bowed coldly. They had known each other for some time, but Tom did not care for Clarence, and his "sporty" ways, and certainly young Hawkesbury had no liking for Tom.

"Well, if you got through I'm sure I can," Clarence said sneeringly to our hero as he passed. "I'm going to get this appointment!" he added.

"If you do you'll have to beat me!" thought Tom, grimly.

CHAPTER III

ANXIOUS DAYS

TOM realized that this first preliminary mental examination was, in a way, not so important as would be the one he must undergo later at West Point, should he be successful in receiving the appointment. But still he knew he must do his best, for there were a number of lads competing, all as anxious as he was to receive the coveted honor.

As a matter of fact Tom was a little fearful of Clarence. Though the nephew of Captain Hawkesbury was, or wanted to be considered, a "sport," still he was a brilliant student when he took a little pains. The trouble with him was that he would do only the minimum amount of study at the high school, and in consequence did not stand high.

But it was evident that he had done some extra preparation for this test, and, as Tom learned afterward, Clarence had, on the suggestion of his uncle, engaged a private tutor. In addition Cap-

tain Hawkesbury, who was an old army officer, knew in a general way what sort of questions would be asked, and he (so Clarence boasted) had been giving the nephew "points."

Captain Hawkesbury was very fond of his rather careless nephew in a certain way. The lad was the son of an only brother of the captain's, and both of Clarence's parents had died when he was a small boy. Perhaps this accounted, in a measure, for his slack ways, his wastefulness with money, and his love for fast companions.

"But it won't do to think he can't beat me," Tom reasoned. "I've just got to do my best to stand far ahead of him."

A room in the court house had been set aside for the candidates, and several local high school teachers were on hand, working in connection with the congressman, to see that matters went off properly.

The boys were seated at tables, well separated, and the rules governing the examination explained to them. Then with pencil and paper, and with the list of questions before them, they set to work.

A hasty glance on the part of Tom showed him that the history examination, which was the first, was comparatively easy. He had always been fond of the study, and had a natural apti-

tude for remembering names and the dates of important events. There was only one question of which he was not quite certain, but he realized that the missing of one would not seriously pull down his average.

He looked around at the other boys, some of whom were writing away bravely, while others were hopelessly, or helplessly, biting the ends of their pencils, or else staring up at the ceiling as if to draw inspiration from that.

Clarence Hawkesbury was seated in front of Tom, and in the next aisle. As our hero was on his last question, having temporarily passed the one about which he was in doubt, Tom saw Clarence working with his right hand partly up the left sleeve of his coat. It was as if the captain's nephew was trying to pull down a wrinkled part of his shirt that annoyed him.

Tom watched, rather idly, and saw Clarence glance quickly around the room. What he saw, or, rather, what he did not see, appeared to be satisfactory, for the lad took from the sleeve of his coat a small folded paper. He glanced at it quickly and then let go of it.

To Tom's surprise the paper quickly disappeared up the sleeve again, with a snapping motion that could leave but one inference.

"He's got some answers written down on a paper, and it's fastened to a rubber band up his

sleeve," decided Tom. "He can pull it down, and, when he lets go of it, the paper snaps back up his sleeve again. It's a sharp trick all right."

It was evident that Clarence had received from his concealed paper the information he lacked, for he at once began writing rapidly.

"The sneak!" mused Tom. "I can't tell on him, of course, but if he passes this exam, and I don't—!"

Tom shrugged his shoulders. There was nothing he could do.

Tom turned in his paper, and, a little later, Clarence did the same. The arrogant youth wore a confident air, and winked his eye at Tom.

The arithmetic and algebra tests were more difficult, but Tom was pretty sure he had passed, especially in the former. There was one problem in the binomial theorem that appalled him for a time. But he set his mind to it, and worked it out in a manner he felt sure was right.

Once again he saw Clarence surreptitiously refer to a paper which he pulled down from his sleeve. It was a risky proceeding, as the high school instructors were walking about the room, looking for any such cheating. But luck (if one can call it luck) favored Clarence. The instructor assigned to his section of the room was rather elderly and near-sighted, and Clarence was not caught.

"Of course I'm not sure he's using a pony," thought Tom, "but it certainly does look so."

During the noon recess, when the boys were allowed to get some lunch, there were all sorts of excited talk about the examinations of the morning. Some declared them "easy," and others expressed the opinion that they were "stiff." Some of the lads, hastily eating a sandwich, began studying feverishly, in anticipation of the afternoon ordeal. Tom decided that he would be better off if he freshened his mind with a walk, for he felt he had done all the studying he could manage with profit, and he reasoned that the hardest part of the ordeal was over.

Two studies formed the basis for examination in the afternoon, and two were set down for the following morning. Tom finished about four o'clock, being one of the first to hand in his papers, and he started to take the trolley back to Chester.

"Think you passed, Tom?" asked a fellow high school student, who came along a little later.

"Well, I sure hope so!" Tom answered. "What did you think of it all?"

"Some wasn't as bad as I was afraid it would be, and part of it was worse. I'm worried about my algebra."

"I didn't think that was so hard, except that one problem. But I managed to make mine

prove, though maybe they won't pass my method."

"You're lucky, Tom!" returned his companion.

Tom was not so sure about that.

"Wait until I see if I get the appointment," he thought.

Mrs. Taylor was anxiously waiting for her son, and inquired as to how the examination had gone. Of course Tom could tell nothing definite, but he and his mother indulged in high hopes. Mrs. Taylor really wanted Tom to go to West Point, since he had so set his heart on it. She felt that, somehow, she would raise the necessary hundred dollars for deposit, even if she had to sell some of the small amount in securities that she kept against the proverbial rainy day.

Tom was up early next morning, and again made the trip to Preston. Some of the boys who had been there the day before were not now on hand. It was whispered that one of them had been caught cheating in getting information from a fellow competitor. Both had been barred.

"I wonder if one of them was Clarence?" mused Tom, as he heard this talk going around before the hour set for the final tests.

But when the doors were being closed Clarence came in, tossing aside the butt of a cigarette.

"Here comes the sport," some one murmured. Clarence heard it, and looked up, obviously not ill-pleased.

This examination was more difficult than Tom had anticipated, and he worked hard over the list of questions. So did most of the other boys, though a few "took it easy." But perhaps they recognized the fact that they had no chance, and so did not worry. Clarence seemed to be writing diligently.

"He's evidently going into this for all he's worth," thought Tom. "Well, so am I, for that matter."

It was something of a nervous strain, and Tom was glad when it was over and he could hand in his papers and go home.

Then came days of anxious waiting—days in which Tom and his mother discussed the possibilities of the case from all angles. Had Tom passed with a high enough average, enough higher than that of the other candidates, to secure the appointment?

There could be but one lad named, with another as alternate, who, in case the first one failed in the tests to be conducted at West Point, would be named for the coveted honor.

Tom dreaded to hear the sound of the postman's whistle. But for nearly a week there was no word. Then when Tom felt, in his despera-

tion, as though he would simply have to telephone to the congressman, and learn what had been the outcome, there came, addressed to him, a long legal-looking envelope. In the upper left-hand corner was the imprint of the congressman's name. It had come from his private law office in Preston.

Tom's fingers trembled, and his heart beat with a smothery, choking sensation. Had he passed? Would he receive the appointment?

Slowly he tore open the envelope.

CHAPTER IV

SUCCESS

THERE was a blur before Tom's eyes; a blur that made the letters and words on the paper in front of him seem misty and far away. He caught his breath sharply. He remembered that his mother was watching him eagerly—anxiously.

"I won't show the white feather before her, no matter what happens, he told himself, fiercely. "If I've failed—"

He pulled himself together with an effort. After all, he did not yet know that he had failed. He brushed his hand across his eyes, and the blur vanished. He caught sight of one word—"congratulations."

That could mean but one thing. He must have passed! Quickly he read enough of the letter from the congressman to gather its import.

It was true. Tom had passed the preliminary examination with the highest mark!

"Hurrah, Mother!" Tom cried. "It's all right! I've passed! I've won out, Mr. Hut-

ton says! I got the highest marks of any in the examination, and he's sent my name as his nominee for West Point to the Secretary of War. Think of that! To the Secretary of War!"

"Oh, I hope there'll be no war!" murmured Mrs. Taylor.

"Don't worry about that part of it, mother!" Tom cried. "Just think of it! I'm going to be a West Point cadet. That is, if I pass the rest of the examinations," he added more soberly.

"Are there more?" asked Mrs. Taylor.

"Oh, yes," Tom replied. "I'll have to answer a lot more questions, and stiffer ones than those they put to us at Preston. I'll have to go before the doctors, too. But I'm not worrying about that. I'll have some time before the middle of June, when I have to take the final entrance examinations, and I'll bone up in the meanwhile. Say, Mother, this is great!" cried Tom, with shining eyes. "Simply great!"

"I'm glad you have succeeded so far, Tom," said his mother in a low voice. "But it will mean a great deal to me to have you away. Still, I suppose you can come home often. West Point isn't very far off."

Tom was silent a moment. His face grew sober.

"No, Mother," he said, slowly, "I'm afraid I'll not be able to get back to see you very often

if I go to West Point. Cadets are allowed only one furlough in the four years. That is, unless something extraordinary happens. I can come home after I've been there two years, but not before."

"Oh, Tom!"

"But you can come to see me," he added, quickly, for he felt a pang himself at the thought of the long separation.

There were tears in Mrs. Taylor's eyes as she said, softly:

"Oh, Tom, I almost wish you hadn't passed!"

He looked at her blankly.

"That is, I don't want to lose you," she went on. "But if you have your heart set on it, I suppose it is all for the best. You can't remain my little boy forever."

Tom felt a lump coming up into his throat, but his mother, seeing which way matters were going smiled as she said:

"There, Tom! we mustn't be sad when there's so much cause for rejoicing. Of course you must go away. All boys do, sooner or later. And if you went to college you'd have to leave me."

"This is better than any college!" cried Tom, enthusiastically. "West Point beats them all, in my estimation. Why, just think of it, they pay you for learning there! I'll get real money—

that is after a while. I'll send you some," he announced. "But say, Mother, now that I have passed so far, and there is a chance of my going to the Academy, what about that hundred dollars deposit? Can we raise it?"

"Oh, yes, I'll manage somehow. Now let me see your letter. Is that all Mr. Hutton says, that you have passed?"

"I haven't read it all myself, yet. That's as far as I got. Hello, what's this?" he exclaimed as his eyes took in the remainder of the epistle. "Hawkesbury named as alternate! Well, I suppose that's only fair, but I'd rather it would have been some one else."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Taylor.

"Why you see, Mother," Tom explained, "the congressman names two candidates. The one getting the highest average is first, and the one who comes second is the alternate. That's to provide, in case the first named doesn't pass the further examinations at West Point, for some one to take his place, and have a try. Otherwise there'd have to be another preliminary test. So Clarence Hawkesbury is my alternate; eh?"

"Does that annoy you, Tom?"

"Oh, no. For we'll not both be in West Point, that is, unless he comes up again next year in case of a vacancy. It will have to be either him or me this time, and I rather think," said Tom,

slowly, "it will be I. I'm going to pass, and make good!"

There was an air of determination about him as he said this that was good to see.

Tom read the letter over again. It gave few details except those that have been mentioned, but it contained the information that, in due time, formal notification would come from the Secretary of War, directing Tom when and where to apply at West Point for the further examinations, physical and mental.

Doubtless Clarence Hawkesbury had received a similar letter, and would also be told to apply at West Point when the time came for the final entrance examination.

"I only hope he doesn't travel with me," thought Tom, for though he had no ill-feeling against Clarence, yet the rich nephew of the old army officer had frequently made it unpleasant for Tom when they had met.

Formerly Mr. Taylor and Captain Hawkesbury had been rather intimate but, with the death of Tom's father, and the discovery that most of his fortune had, in some manner, been acquired by the army officer and Mr. Doolittle, Tom could not help feeling coldly toward both the men. There was no specific reason for it, but Mrs. Taylor, too, did not like Captain Hawkesbury. Nor had she any warmer regard for Mr. Doo-

little, though they both offered to do what they could to help settle up the estate.

The trouble of it was that there was very little left to be settled up—that is little for Tom and his mother, and Mrs. Taylor preferred the services of a young lawyer to those of Captain Hawkesbury or Mr. Doolittle.

In view of this it can easily be imagined that Tom did not have the warmest feeling in the world for the arrogant and supercilious youth who was to be his rival—a rival, at least, until the results of the final entrance examinations were known.

Once the delicious thrill of excitement following the receipt of the congressman's letter was over, Tom and his mother began to consider ways and means. It would mean a change for them if Tom was to live permanently at West Point for four years. There was much to be done to get ready. But Tom, in the flush of his first success, made little of these preparations.

"We'll manage—somehow," said Mrs. Taylor, cheerfully.

CHAPTER V

AN ATTACK

A FEW days after Tom had received the letter from Congressman Hutton, our hero was further elated to get another missive through the mail. This came in a long official-looking envelope. It bore the imprint of the Secretary of War's office, and came through the post office without bearing a stamp, which fact further gave Tom an idea of the importance he was beginning to assume.

"Though of course Clarence got one like it, too, I suppose," he thought. "Well, I can't have everything to myself."

The letter from the Secretary of War, signed with his own name, much to Tom's delight, formally notified our hero of his appointment, and directed him to report on a certain date, about the middle of June, at West Point for further examination.

"And now," decided Tom, after he had shown the secretary's letter to his mother and to many

admiring friends, "I'm going to buckle down to hard work. I've just got to pass those exams!"

Tom had little doubt as to the result of the physical tests. He was in fine condition; he had lived a manly, clean life.

He played baseball and football in season, he was a good runner, jumper and swimmer. In short, he was an average, healthful American lad—a good all-around athlete, though no phenomenon in any one branch of sport.

He had been quickly passed by the first doctors who examined him, and though he realized that the physical tests at West Point would be more severe, he was not worrying on that score.

"But they may spring something on me in the mental tests that I'm not ready for," mused Tom. "So I'm going to buck up."

With this end in view he went to his high school principal, and had him map out a course of extra study that would bridge our hero over several rather shaky places. This was about the middle of May, so Tom had nearly a full month in which to prepare.

He heard indirectly that Clarence Hawkesbury was doing the same thing, but Clarence made rather a secret of it. Tom met him one evening in town, after a moving picture show given under the auspices of a high school society.

"Well, what's the good word?" asked Clar-

ence, with an appearance of good-fellowship Tom knew did not exist. Clarence blew out a cloud of highly-scented cigarette smoke as he put the question.

"Oh, everything's lovely," Tom answered, easily.

"Hear you're going to West Point with me, as alternate," went on Clarence, speaking in unnecessarily loud tones.

"I thought it was the other way around," responded Tom, slowly. "I understand you are the alternate."

"Pooh, you didn't beat me more than five points on the average," boasted Clarence, and this was true enough as far as the mental examination went. It was not true with the physical, however. "And I'll lay you odds of two to one that I stay at West Point and you come back," went on Clarence, sneeringly.

"Thank you. I don't bet," replied Tom. "But that needn't stop you," he added, for he did not want to be thought a prig.

"Oh, don't worry! it won't!" declared the youth, who had more money than was good for him. He swung off down the street with some cronies, spenders like himself, and a little later Tom and a chum or two passed them standing in the door of a poolroom, whence came the click of the ivory and colored balls.

As Tom passed he saw Clarence and Isaac Blake, two cronies, in close conversation in one corner of the doorway. Apparently they did not observe Tom, who heard Isaac remark:

"Think you'll get a chance at him?"

"I'll make the chance, if I don't get it," muttered Clarence. "If I can't get there one way I shall another. Can I depend on you?"

"You sure can," Ike said, and then Tom heard no more, for he passed on down the street.

"I wonder who it is they want a chance at?" Tom reflected. But if he gave it any further thought it was to guess idly that the talk referred to some one whom Clarence wanted to beat at pool or billiards.

That night Tom sat up late doing some extra studying, for he had neglected his lessons somewhat in order to go to the picture show.

Tom felt a bit tired the next day. He realized what caused it—studying too late. His eyes, too, were tired; possibly from pouring too long over text books, added to the strain of watching what the Scotchman called the "shiftin' pictures."

"I know what I'm going to do," thought Tom. "I'll go for a walk down by the river. It's a fine day, and it ought to be nice on the water. I'll get a boat and go for a row all by myself. I want to calm down. I've been doing too much thinking."

It was Friday, and because of some special exercises the high school closed earlier than usual. Tom hurried home, changed into an old suit that would not be soiled by the water or mud in a boat, and made his way to the river. There were several pavilions where boats could be hired, but Tom, feeling rather in the mood for walking, went on until he had nearly reached the big railroad bridge, not far from which was a boathouse.

"And to think my father once owned all this land," Tom mused as he looked at the big foundations on one side of the river. "If we had what the railroad company paid for it mother wouldn't have to work so hard. Of course money wouldn't make any difference to me at West Point. That's one place where money doesn't count. But if we had a few thousands mother could be nearer me, say in New York, and she could run up to see me once in a while. It's going to be a long drill—two years at a stretch. But I guess I can stand it all right."

Tom was about to proceed to the boathouse to hire a craft, when he was aware of a figure coming around a bend in the path that led to the river. A moment later he saw that it was Captain Hawkesbury. Rather a stern and forbidding figure it was too, for the uncle of Clarence was a gruff man, though it was said he was very fond of his nephew.

"Good afternoon, sir," said Tom, saluting in what he hoped was the correct military fashion.

"Um! Afternoon," was the half-grunted retort. Nor did Captain Hawkesbury take the trouble to return the salute. Perhaps he did not see it, or Tom may not have executed it properly.

"Oh, it's you! is it; young Taylor?" went on the captain, looking at our hero from under shaggy, heavy eyebrows. "Um! I—er—I understand you're going to have a try at West Point, young man."

"Yes, Captain! I'm going to take the examinations."

"And my nephew—er—he's going too?"

"Yes. He's my alternate!"

Tom could not refrain from that little exultation.

"Um, yes. Well, I don't wish you any bad luck, young man, but I believe Clarence will win. He comes of fighting stock, sir! fighting stock!" and the army captain smote the ground with his cane, making the dirt fly.

"We have some fighters in our family, too," Tom said, not to be outdone. "On my father's and mother's side we boast of what our families did in the Revolution."

"Um! Oh yes, the Taylors did their share—their share," admitted Captain Hawkesbury. "Well, we shall see! We shall see!" and mut-

tering something under his breath, which Tom was not able to catch, the old fighter strode along.

"Not a very cheerful sort of man," thought Tom, as he went down to get a boat. He thoroughly enjoyed the row on the river, and began to feel more like himself. He rowed until the lengthening shadows warned him it was time to return to his home, and a little later he was walking along the river bank.

Around a bend, near the place where he had met Captain Hawkesbury some time before, Tom heard voices, two of which at least, were familiar to him. The possessors of the voices were talking and laughing rather hilariously.

Suddenly footsteps could be heard, indicating that several persons were running along the hard-packed path, and a moment later Tom saw Clarence, Ike and a number of their cronies coming on the run.

"Looks as though they were having a race," mused Tom.

"Get out the way! Let us pass! Don't block the path!" called Clarence. "One side, Taylor, we're trying to see who's the best-footed."

The path was narrow at this point. On one side was the river and on the other a low, swampy place. Tom had hardly room to get to one side.

"They have nerve," he mused. "Why

couldn't they wait until they had room to race. I can't get out of their way."

The other lads gave him no chance. On they came swinging toward him, and, an instant later, as Clarence tried to pass Tom, the rich youth slid down the bank toward the river.

"Look out!" Tom cried.

"Look out yourself!" retorted Clarence quickly. "What do you mean by shoving me?"

"I didn't!" Tom answered.

"And I say you did!" snapped Clarence. "You did it on purpose, and I'll make you wish you hadn't!" He recovered himself and came rushing at Tom with clenched fists.

CHAPTER VI

OFF TO WEST POINT

TOM was taken almost completely by surprise when the attack came. It seemed so uncalled for, and so unnecessary. But Tom was not the one to stand and be struck without giving, in a measure, as good as he took, particularly when he was not in the wrong.

"I—I'll show you!" muttered Clarence. He aimed a blow at Tom, but the latter cleverly dodged and Clarence nearly over-balanced himself, almost doing what he had wrongfully accused Tom of trying to do, and falling into the river.

"Soak him, Hawkesbury!" cried the cronies of the rich lad. "Give it to him good and proper!"

"I will! Watch me!" cried Clarence, and this time his blow landed in Tom's face. The pain was stinging, for Clarence was no light hitter, but Tom came back instantly with as good a return.

In another moment the two boys were fighting,

or rather, Clarence was attacking Tom, who defended himself vigorously. He was at a loss to account for the real savagery in the onslaught of the other. It was as though some great enmity were at the bottom of it, instead of being merely a fancied wrong on the part of Clarence.

The latter missed another heavy blow at Tom, who, in turn, countered, and swung so cleverly that Clarence was sent swinging backward against one of his companions.

"Here! Look out what you're doing there, Taylor!" growled the youth in question.

"Yes, he's getting too fresh!" chimed in Ike Blake. "I guess I'll have something to say in this racket!"

As Clarence recovered himself, Ike doubled up his fists and the two of them came at Tom together. Our hero caught his breath. He was not afraid, but it was manifestly unfair. The injustice of it, however, did not seem to strike the cronies of Clarence.

The latter reached Tom first, who, being unwilling to take too many chances, led out with a blow that might have been effective had it landed. But Clarence dodged, and, a moment later a gruff voice called out:

"Here! What's the meaning of this! How dare you attack my nephew? Stop it at once!"

The boys all turned to see the angry face of

Captain Hawkesbury fairly glaring at them. But most of the anger seemed turned in Tom's direction.

"Cease that attack at once!" came the order. "You, young Taylor, I mean!"

Tom was not going to be unjustly accused without a protest.

"Your nephew struck me first!" he retorted. "I was just defending myself, and it looks as though they all wanted to fight," he added, with a nod toward the cronies of the rich and arrogant youth. "I don't mind taking one at a time," Tom said more calmly, "but if they want to pile on all at once I'm going to quit."

"This fighting must cease!" declared the captain. "Let my nephew alone, Taylor!"

"I'm perfectly willing to, if he'll let me alone. He struck me first."

"He deliberately got in our way when we were having a race, and nearly pushed me into the water," Clarence said.

"That isn't true," Tom said, calmly. "And you know it, Hawkesbury!"

Clarence scowled but did not answer.

"Stop this at once!" went on the choleric man. "I forbid this fight to go on. Clarence, you report to me, and I'll take this matter up with Taylor later."

Tom did not pay much attention to this. He

passed on, rather excited it is true, but feeling that he had not had altogether the worst of it.

"Though I would have had if they'd all piled on me at once, which they seemed about to do," Tom mused, as he walked on by himself. "I wonder what their game was? Could it be that Clarence wanted to 'do' me; to make me lame, or bruise me so I'll not show up well at the physical examination in West Point?"

Like a flash there came to Tom the memory of certain words he had overheard in the billiard hall entrance.

"Clarence Hawkesbury could easily put up a game like that, with the help of Ike Blake," he declared. "I wouldn't be surprised but that was it.

"If I fell down in the physical test, through being slightly injured, or something like that, Clarence would stand next for West Point. If that was his game I've got to be on the lookout."

Tom said nothing to his mother about the attack, accounting for some scratches and bruises by saying he had had a little mishap while boating. And as Mrs. Taylor was so busy getting Tom's things ready for his trip to the military academy she did not ask many questions.

"Oh, but that's an unsightly bruise on your face," she said. "I hope it will disappear before you go to West Point."

"I think it will," Tom said. "And I'll take good care not to get any more there," he mused.

Tom saw nothing of Clarence during the next few days, in which he was busy getting ready for his trip up the Hudson. He also spent as much time as he could working on his studies. But in spite of all his hard work, he felt a horrible fear at times that he would fail to reach the standard set in the mental tests.

Finally he reached the point where he was in such a nervous state that one of the high school teachers who was coaching him advised him to drop his books for a day or two, and live in the open. This Tom did and his strained nerves came back to normal again.

Mrs. Taylor had raised the hundred dollars that Tom must deposit to be allowed to take the examination. If he failed it would be returned to him, less a small charge for board during his stay at West Point. Just how much his mother had sacrificed to raise this sum Tom never knew.

"But I do wish you had more money to live on, Mother," he said a few days before he was to depart for West Point. "You ought to be rich."

"Riches do not always bring happiness, Tom," she said.

"They often help a whole lot," Tom said, with a smile. "But never mind, Mother, some day when I'm an army officer, or a big engineer, I

shall be able to send you money regularly. Then you won't have to sew when you don't want to."

"Oh, I like sewing," said the widow. "I wouldn't sit around and do nothing. I couldn't!"

The days passed more quickly now, at least to Mrs. Taylor, though Tom thought each one was forty-eight hours long. He planned to go to New York by train from Chester, and as he would arrive in the metropolis in the evening, he would stay at a hotel there, and go on to Highland Falls the next morning. Highland Falls is a village a mile below West Point, and there most of the prospective candidates stay before reporting for their examinations. There are plenty of hotel accommodations there.

Finally the day came. Tom said good-bye to his mother, not without a choking sensation in his throat, and he had to turn his head away and blow his nose rather more often than seemed absolutely necessary. She did not go to the station with him, as she feared she would break down, and she did not want to give way for Tom's sake.

"Good-bye," she faltered. "I—I know you'll do well, Tom."

"It won't be for want of trying," he answered. And a little later he found himself at the station, watching the train pull in that was to take him on the first stage of his trip to historic West Point.

CHAPTER VII

GETTING READY

OUR hero was excited, and no wonder. He had gone through many unusual experiences since he had begun to think of going to West Point, and now he was on the verge of new ones. He was in a sort of daze. Matters followed each other so closely that there was little time between to think properly of them.

"But there's one thing sure," he thought to himself, as he sat looking from the car window as he was being whirled along his way, "there is one thing sure, and that is that I have the chance I've been wanting so long. If I don't make the most of it, it will be my own fault."

He ventured to look about him more calmly now, thinking perhaps he might see some one in the car whom he knew. But a quick glance through the coach did not disclose any one, though he noticed two or three lads about his own age, talking and laughing together.

Tom thought he would like to know them, and

he wondered if, by any chance, they could be in his position—a “plebe” going up to West Point for the all-important examination. Then another thought came to our hero.

Where was Clarence Hawkesbury? He, too, was supposed to go to take the examination on the day Tom reported, which would be the morrow. Where was Clarence?

“He may have gone on ahead, or he may motor to New York,” Tom thought, for Captain Hawkesbury had a powerful car, and with his nephew frequently took long trips.

“I’m just as glad he isn’t going with me,” Tom thought. Then he settled down to enjoy the journey which would last all day. At noon Tom went to the dining car for lunch, and there he saw, at the table across the aisle from him, some of the lads he had noticed in his own coach. He could overhear some of their talk.

“Well, there’s one thing sure,” remarked a sturdy-looking youth, “if I don’t get through it isn’t going to kill me, and I won’t have to go around four years with my back as straight as a ramrod.”

Tom guessed instantly where his fellow-travelers were going, but he did not like to say anything just yet.

“I don’t mind the examinations so much,” a studious-looking lad remarked, “but I sure do hate

to think of getting hazed. They say it's fierce!"

"So I've heard," agreed another. "Pass the celery; will you?"

"If they try to haze me!" exclaimed a heavy-browed youth, "I'll show 'em they'll have their hands full."

"Well, the more trouble you make the more they'll make," said the first speaker with a sigh.

"We plebes aren't supposed to have any rights."

Tom was sure, now, that the lads across the aisle were "in the same boat" with himself. He could not refrain from speaking to them.

"I beg your pardon," he remarked, "but are you going to take the West Point examinations?"

The others looked at him, rather curiously for a moment, and one of them said:

"Yes, we are."

"I'm in the same fix," went on Tom, quickly. "Do any of you know anything about what we ought to do when we get there; where to report and so on?"

In an instant the reserve of the others seemed to melt, and they welcomed him, figuratively, with open arms. They were companions in a certain prospective misfortune. It developed that one of the lads had a relative who had attended West Point, and this relative had given some valuable advice which the lad, Samuel Leland by name, was glad to share with Tom and the others.

From then on the talk was of nothing but West Point, and the fear of hazing formed a large proportion of the conversation. Tom found that his new friends were going to stop at a different hotel in New York from that which he had picked out, and he decided to change and go with them. He was glad he did, for when he arrived in the big city he was fairly astonished by the bustle and roar. One of the other boys had been there on several occasions, however, and he acted as guide to the others.

That night and the next day were a sort of dream to Tom Taylor, for they decided to postpone their trip to Highland Falls for a day and see the sights of New York. Tom knew his mother would not object, and if he succeeded in passing into West Point it would be two years before he could get away again. He sent his mother a letter from the metropolis.

"Well, we might as well start and get it over with," remarked Sam Leland the next day to Tom and the other candidates. They were at the hotel in New York, and had planned to cross the Hudson to Weehawken, to take the West Shore railroad, which would bring them to the village a mile below West Point. There they would stay until next day when they were due to report for examinations.

"Yes, no use lingering longer here," agreed

Tom. "I can't enjoy anything when I think of what's before me."

The others confessed the same thing, and, accordingly, soon after lunch they took the ferry to Weehawken, and in due time were on their way to Highland Falls, a ride of about two hours.

Tom and the other lads walked up the winding road leading from the Highland Falls station to the hotel where they were to stop. The day was warm and the road dusty and they were not feeling any too comfortable. The little party Tom had fallen in with saw several other youths toiling up the hill, evidently with the same objective point as themselves. They, too, were "candidates."

A bath, a change of linen, and supper made Tom feel much better, and then came a long evening spent on the hotel porch where were many other lads, all eager for what lay before them—eager and anxious, most of them; some so much so that they went about with books in their hands, gluing their eyes to the pages every now and then. They were "cramming for exams," and no greater torture can be devised for a young fellow.

Some of the boys told of having gone up to have a look at West Point that day, they having been at Highland Falls for some time, preparing for the ordeal. Some were even being tutored at a special preparatory school in the neighborhood.

"The farther you fellows keep away from West Point until it's time for you to report, the better," said one lad who seemed to know whereof he spoke. "Don't give those cadets a chance to get one in on you, which they're sure to do if they see you nosing around up at the barracks before it's time. Stay away until it's time to report."

This Tom and some of his friends resolved to do. However, they could not refrain the next morning from going a short distance toward the group of gray stone buildings that make up the United States Military Academy. In the distance they could see the cadets passing to and fro, some of them drilling; and Tom, at least, felt a thrill of anticipation.

"Oh, if I can only get in!" he sighed.

"That's right!" remarked Leland. "It sure is a great place."

The next day Tom, and the other candidates, left the Highland Falls hotel to report to the superintendent of the Academy, which was the real beginning of the examination that meant so much to them. At last they were to have a taste of life at West Point, though for some of them it might last only the few days intervening between their official entrance and the rigid tests.

On the way to West Point Tom caught a glimpse of Clarence Hawkesbury in company with

some flashily dressed youths. They were riding in a sort of public coach, and Clarence waved his hand to Tom, as though the best of feeling existed between them.

"I wonder where the superintendent's office is?" remarked one of the youths with Tom. "I don't suppose we dare speak to any of those high and mighty cadets to ask."

"Not if we see any one else," Tom said. And on their way they met a soldier—not a cadet—who directed them to the headquarters building, in which was located the office of the adjutant to whom they were to report in person.

A number of rather anxious-looking lads were there, and Tom and the others formed in line to march up stairs. One by one they entered a room, and presented their credentials to the stiff and severe-looking officer who sat behind a table. He glanced at their letters of appointment, checked their names off on a list, and told them to go down stairs and wait for further instructions.

"Well, I wonder what comes next?" said Tom to his new friends. He soon learned. A cadet, who, from the stripes on his arm they knew to be a corporal, came walking stiffly up.

"Here, you candidates!" he cried, in a voice that contained perhaps a little too much authority. "Turn out! Lively now! Turn out! Form in a column—by twos! Forward—march!"

There was an uneasy scramble, and a more or less uneven column was formed to march along with the corporal at the head. He was a martinet, was that corporal—and he found fault with every one and everything from the beginning.

"Why, you fellows don't even know enough to keep step!" he bawled at them. "Do you know which your left foot is?"

"Yes," replied Tom, who felt a little nettled at the tone.

"Yes—what?" sharply demanded the corporal, swinging around to face him.

"I thought you said—" stammered Tom.

"Yes—what?" fairly thundered the cadet.

"Say sir," some one behind Tom whispered.

"Yes—sir!" he answered loudly.

"That's better!" was the mollified retort. "Don't forget that sir! I'm glad some of you know which is your left foot. Now then, step out!"

They managed it a little better now, though doubtless they were awkward enough.

"Eyes—front!" snapped out the corporal, as some one ventured to look about. "Eyes—front!"

In due time the awkward squad was marched to one of the barrack divisions, where the cadet officers, in charge of the candidates, had their headquarters. There the corporal reported Tom and

the others to a cadet lieutenant who recorded them and assigned them to quarters—three to a room.

Tom had thought that he and the others would be examined before getting this far at West Point, but it seemed he did not know all the routine yet. At least, he was to have a real taste of life before knowing whether or not he would be allowed to remain.

The ordeal of being recorded by the lieutenant was much more trying than in the case of the adjutant. Some of the boys forgot the all-important "sir," and were sharply rebuked. But in the end they learned how to answer properly, and to give when they were asked where they were from, the name of their state, and not the name of their town or city.

"Don't forget your 'misters' and 'sirs,'" advised the lieutenant as a parting shot, when Tom and the other luckless candidates marched off to the Cadet Store to draw their first supplies—their housekeeping utensils as it were—for they were to do their own work for a time. Each candidate received from the Cadet Store a quantity of bedding, a pillow, a mattress, a broom, a pail and a chair, in addition to a dipper. These were to be used while they were candidates, and could be kept if they passed the examinations. If they failed they would have to turn them in again, and from the hundred dollars deposited would be deducted

the board for the time they had been at West Point.

Tom's mother had sent this sum on in advance, a fact of which our hero was aware, though he did not know the source whence the money came.

"Whew! This is some early rising!" exclaimed Sam Leland as he examined the printed list of "calls" that had been given to them after they had secured their equipment.

Reveille came at six o'clock, followed half an hour later by breakfast. At one o'clock dinner was served, and supper came after retreat parade. Of course the candidates had no part in the parade.

"Oh, six o'clock isn't so bad—not in summer," Tom said. He had often risen earlier than that in winter to do a job of snow-shoveling to earn money at home.

"Well, it's early for me," remarked Clarence Hawkesbury, with a supercilious grin. "And this dipper is—beastly!" he exclaimed, as he looked at the one made from half a cocoanut shell that had been issued to him. "I'm going to buy a collapsible cup," he declared.

"Better not," advised some one who knew. "Everything we're allowed to have is strictly arranged for, and if you're caught with anything contraband—good-night!"

"They won't catch me!" Clarence said.

Tom hoped Clarence wouldn't have a chance to be caught, since if Clarence remained it meant that our hero would have failed. And that he fiercely made up his mind not to do.

The candidates, with their new belongings, now passed on to their rooms. Tom was quartered with Sam Leland and a lad named Harry Houston. He liked them both from the first.

"And now to get ready for the exams," commented Tom, when they found themselves in their room.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SLIDE FOR LIFE

TOM, who had, with the other two candidates, dragged the bedding and other things to the room they were to share in common, at least for a time, looked at his companions. They hardly knew what to do next, for they had received so many orders and instructions that their minds were in a whirl.

About them, through the corridors of the building, they could hear other candidates going to their rooms with their possessions. There was not much noise, for the "lowly candidates" were beginning to feel how unimportant they were compared to the "lordly cadets."

"Here comes some one," remarked Sam, as they saw their door pushed open. A corporal—a supercilious and sneering corporal—entered. Watson his name was, as they learned later.

"Here, you!" he said, sharply. "That's no way to pile your stuff. You—what's your name?" he asked, turning to Harry Houston.

"Er—Houston," stammered the lad, and in a flash Tom and Sam knew their friend had forgotten the proper form.

"Mister Houston, sir!" fairly thundered the corporal. "Say it after me!"

"Mister Houston, sir!" imitated the luckless one.

"That's better," came in semi-mollified tones. "Now I'll show you how to get your room into shape—and keep it so!" he added impressively. "You'll be inspected when you least look for it. Don't get caught, whatever you do!"

His manner was so important that Tom, at least, resolved that there should not be a pin out of place. The corporal showed them how to make up their cots. He indicated the official Blue Book, a copy of which was required to be kept at all times in a certain place in the room. This book gave minute directions for keeping the room in order, and specified much as to the candidate's conduct.

Though neither Tom nor his companions were cadets yet, the strictest military discipline must be observed by them. They had to report on leaving their room, and on coming back, and they could not leave unless it was absolutely necessary. It was a hard life, but doubtless it had the intended effect.

Once the beds were arranged to the liking of

the corporal, and he was not easy to please, Tom and the others were taught to stand at "attention." This position—as stiff as a ramrod, with eyes straight to the front, and never, by any chance, allowed to rest on the countenance of the officer—must be maintained whenever any cadet officer, or the tactical officer in charge of instructions, came into the quarters of the candidate. The tactical officers were called "tacs," and were army officers, graduates from the Academy, who, in turn, were stationed for four years at West Point to give military instruction.

"And we've got to look out for the tacs," said Sam Leland, when the corporal had left them alone for a time. "They're always showing up when you least expect them, and if they find a thing out of place in your room—fare thee well, gentle maiden!" and he sighed, and dropped wearily into a chair.

"Well, if I don't get something to eat pretty soon, they won't have any trouble with me, nor I with them," observed Harry.

"Why?" asked Tom, curiously.

"I'll drop dead from hunger—that's why. I wonder if they'll give me a funeral with full military honors in case I die on their hands?" he asked, whimsically.

"No such luck!" returned Tom, with a laugh. "But I think it must be time for dinner. It's one

o'clock and there goes a crowd of the cadets toward the dining hall."

They looked from the window to observe the nattily dressed lads march along to stirring music. Presently came the summons the candidates were waiting for. In columns of twos they marched to the mess hall, entering last, and were given seats at a table some distance removed from that at which the yearlings, or cadets who had been at the Academy a year, were to eat.

The dinner was excellent, but there was no lingering over it. When the candidates had been marched back to their barracks Tom and his chums decided to put in some time at studying. Twice while they were at work a corporal came in to inspect their room, and each time they had to rise smartly, and stand at attention until he went out. No fault could be found with the lads themselves or their room, and at this the corporal seemed to be deeply disappointed.

Studying went on until parade time, which brought with it a rigid inspection of each candidate in person, from his collar to his shoes. Some were reprimanded for not being neat enough.

"Parade rest!" came the order after inspection, after which there boomed out on the evening air the sound of the retreat gun. Then followed a march to the mess hall for supper.

"And now for some more boning," Tom ob-

served with a sigh, when he and his three chums were in their room again.

"Say, we're not getting an awful lot of fun out of this," said Sam, as he opened his arithmetic.

"We didn't exactly come here for fun," Harry remarked.

Tom looked critically over the room, and straightened a pillow on his bed, for he knew that inspection was timed for nine-thirty, and he wanted no reproof.

The "tac" came in, looked over everything with a coldly calm and critical eye, while Tom and his chums stood stiffly at attention.

"Make up your beds," he said to them, as he went out, and they breathed easier.

They would be allowed to have a light until ten o'clock. At that hour taps was sounded—three beats of a drum—at which signal every candidate must be in bed, with lights out. A dark-lantern inspection would follow some time later, and it would not be well for any of the new lads to be caught with a gleam of light in his room, nor must he be anywhere but between the covers, and with his room in perfect order. It certainly was a life of military hardship and exactness from the very start. And, as yet, none of the lads knew whether he was to be a cadet eventually or not.

You may be sure Tom and his two new chums did not oversleep the next morning. They were

dressed and waiting for the sound of the reveille gun which presently boomed out, followed by the thunder of drums and the shrill squealing of fifes in the hall below.

"Candidates turn out!" came the command, and the new lads came pouring from their rooms, helter-skelter, anxious not to be late.

"And now for the ordeal," groaned Tom, as, after breakfast, he and the others, in squads of ten, were marched toward the cadet hospital, where they were to undergo a searching physical examination.

Three army surgeons, grim and grizzled, went over each boy minutely. Their feet were looked at, for the United States government, as well as that of other nations, has found that a soldier to be of value must not be troubled with corns and ingrowing nails. It impedes his marching. And as a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, so a company can march no faster than its poorest walker. No poor walkers are wanted.

And teeth—

"You'd think we were horses up for sale," complained Clarence Hawkesbury, after one of the doctors had made him and the others open their mouths. Some one recalled the old joke about the recruit who was rejected because of poor teeth. He had said he wanted to shoot the enemy, not to bite 'em!

But, after all, a soldier's digestion depends in a great measure on his ability to chew often not tender food. And among the few true things said about war is that "an army fights on its stomach." No soldier can be a first-class one if he has such bad teeth that he cannot chew well.

It was a most searching examination, and no one knew whether he had passed or not, for the doctors merely looked wise and jotted down notes on papers before them.

However, it developed during the day that some of the candidates had been rejected as physically unfit, and as Tom and his two chums received no notification that they had not passed, they took it for granted that they had gone through—as they had.

In due time came the mental examinations. It was a grilling experience for all, and a number of lads were on the verge of nervous breakdown before it was over.

However, Tom had made an excellent preparation and he felt sure he had gone through, if not with flying colors, at least on a safe margin. The examination was more severe than he had imagined it would be.

Several days were consumed in getting through with the examinations, as nothing was done hurriedly. The candidates were kept to themselves during this period, and though the upper class-

men were forbidden to come to the barracks while the candidates were there, the rule was often violated, and mild hazing was indulged in, especially in the bathrooms. Some of the boys were made to give an imitation of swimming, as they lay face downward on a chair.

It was one day, after a particularly hard examination, that Tom went in to freshen up with a bath. As he undressed he was suddenly seized by a couple of yearlings, one of whom yelled in his ear:

“Now for the slide for life!”

“Chuck that water on the floor,” said the other cadet to Tom, who emptied a pail on the tiles of the bathroom.

“Now slide!” cried the two together. Deftly they tripped Tom up. He fell rather heavily, and was given a shove that carried him across the slippery, wet floor up against the other side of the bathroom with a force that jarred the breath from him, and made him feel sick and dizzy. Tom’s head swam and black spots danced before his eyes. He feared he was going to faint, but held himself back from the brink with an effort, as he heard a sharp voice saying:

“Here! That’s enough! Don’t you know what’ll happen if you’re caught at that?”

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN HAWKESBURY.

TOM managed to stand up, though he felt weak and dizzy. He saw rather sheepish looks on the faces of the two yearlings who had begun to haze him. Behind them stood one of the older cadets.

"You'd better go," he said to the two hazers. Then of Tom he asked in not unkindly tone: "Are you all right?"

"Yes, sir," Tom answered, saluting, though had it not been for the pain of bruises he would have felt like laughing, standing at attention as he was, ready for his bath.

The older cadet said nothing more. Doubtless he understood. For hazing at West Point is severely prohibited now, though doubtless a mild form goes on more or less surreptitiously.

Tom took a hot bath, which made him feel better, and when he had gone under the stinging shower he was braced up sufficiently to make him almost forget his painful bruises, for they did hurt.

Our hero did not feel any resentment against the lads who had started him on the "slide for life," as it used to be called. It was part of the game, though a forbidden part. And Tom knew better than to make a fuss about it. His life would have been miserable from then on had he done so.

After all, hazing, if not too severe and if it is unaccompanied by indignities that lower one's self-respect, has its use in the world. It teaches a young man certain lessons that are hard to drill into him in other ways. But hazing, as it is often done in schools and colleges, is sometimes a silly performance, and sometimes a positively harmful proceeding.

"What's the matter, Tom?" asked Harry Houston, a little later, as the three new chums were in their barrack room. "You walk lame."

"Oh, I got a little bump in the bathroom," Tom answered, evasively.

"Huh! I think I can guess how," said Sam. "I didn't have it so easy yesterday, myself. But it's all in the day's work."

The next day was the last of the examinations, and there were evidences of relief on all sides. But still there was the haunting fear in the heart of every candidate that he had not passed. It would be about two days before the results would be announced, and those two days are, perhaps,

filled with more agony than any others in the life of a West Pointer, except, it may be, when the final examinations come.

During the two days of waiting there had been little to occupy the attention of the candidates. They were obliged to keep to their rooms most of the time, and dismal enough it was, too. But there was no help for it.

"I do wish they'd hurry up and end the suspense," cried Harry one day when it was rumored that the results were to be made known that afternoon.

"Yes, it's like keeping a fellow on pins and needles all the while," agreed Sam.

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom, rising to his feet. "I think—"

"Candidates turn out promptly!" came an order, interrupting him. "Turn out!"

"They're going to make the announcements," Sam said, and his hands trembled as he reached for his cap.

Tom said nothing, but gritted his teeth. If he had failed—well, he had made a brave attempt.

Downstairs went the candidates, all of them eagerly anxious, and perhaps not one but was nervously anxious. Their faces showed the strain they were under.

In the area they were formed in a single rank, while in front of them stood the adjutant of the

Academy—the same one to whom Tom and the others had reported the first day of their arrival.

He announced that those whose names he called were to step two paces to the front, the others were to maintain their place in the ranks. The name-calling followed immediately, in alphabetical order, and, one after another, certain lads stepped out. Tom's name would come far down on the list. He listened when the "H" division was reached, but Houston's was not called. Nor was Leland's. And the adjutant went through the "T" column without mentioning Tom.

Our hero was puzzled. Had he failed? Why had his name not been called if he passed? No one seemed to understand what it was all about or what system was being followed.

Finally the reading was over. In front, two paces in advance of one line, stood another row of cadets. The front rank was the smaller in number.

Then, with wildly-beating hearts, Tom and the others listened to the words of the adjutant. Those whose names had been called, he stated, had failed in their examinations, and could not continue at the Academy. They would turn in their equipment and withdraw. The others would remain, and start on their four years' training to become army officers.

"Then I've passed!" Tom said, exultantly to

himself. "I've passed and Clarence hasn't!"

He wanted to laugh, to shout and yell at his good fortune. Not that he wanted to gloat over the failure of young Hawkesbury. It was just that Tom was fully alive to what it meant to him to have succeeded.

There was a deep silence following the announcement of the adjutant. Doubtless others of the successful ones than Tom wanted to laugh and shout, but they had to refrain. And probably those who had failed had hard work to keep back the tears of disappointment. For after all, they were only boys around seventeen years of age, and disappointment is keener than later, just as success is more sweet.

But it was all very cold and impartial at the West Point Academy. No one congratulated the successful ones, though when ranks were broken they did exult among themselves. And there was small comfort for the losers, most of whom, however, accepted it gamely.

"I'm glad I don't have to go through the four years' grind," said one lad, who, it was rumored, was quite wealthy. "I'm going out West on a ranch now, and do some real living."

Later on, when hard work came, Tom often envied him. But Tom was not going to turn back now.

"Well, old man, we made it!" said Harry, as

he shook Tom's hand, once they were in their room again.

"That's what we did!" declared Sam. "Oh, but I was shaky!"

"So was I," Tom admitted, with a laugh.

Those who had been "found"—which means they had lost the examination—lost little time in turning in their belongings, and taking the train back to their homes. Some declared they would make another attempt next year, while others went off, sullenly angry.

"And now for uniforms!" exclaimed Harry, a little later. "No more 'cits,' for at least two years, when we get our first furlough." The clothes Tom and his chums had worn up to this time had been those they brought from home. They were the attire of civilians, or citizens, which last word has been abbreviated to "cits" by the cadets.

"We'll get any old sort of a uniform now," said Sam, who had been forewarned. "Later on we'll be measured for one that fits, and then melted and poured into it."

Indeed so well did the clothes of the cadets fit them that the simile of Sam was not inappropriate.

Each of the successful candidates received two pairs of uniform shoes, two pairs of gray flannel trousers, a gray blouse and a cap.

"Now we really are somebody!" exclaimed Tom, with a sigh of content as he surveyed himself in the small mirror allowed in their room.

"Well, yes, it's a beginning," said Sam.

The next day they were marched to headquarters, to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, to serve for eight years, unless sooner discharged. Each lad had to pay a twenty-five cent fee to an old clerk, who acted as notary public in administering the oath.

It was when Tom and the others were coming from drill, a few days later, with aching shoulders and legs—for the ordeal had been severe—that our hero received a surprise.

With his chums he was passing along the parade ground, when he saw approaching an officer whose figure seemed vaguely familiar. The "plebes" saluted as they passed him. Tom had a look at his face.

"Captain Hawkesbury!" murmured Tom, under his breath. "What can he be doing here?" he asked Sam, as he passed on, getting a sharp look from the glittering eyes of Clarence's uncle.

"Who?" asked Sam.

"That officer—Captain Hawkesbury," Tom went on, indicating the man they had just passed.

"Oh, him. Why he's been assigned here from the regular army, I heard, to give special instruction. Why, do you know him?"

"Yes, and I—I wish I didn't," murmured Tom. He felt a vague sense of foreboding. What would the presence of Captain Hawkesbury mean to our hero at West Point, when Tom had been successful over the officer's favorite nephew? Tom was apprehensive.

CHAPTER X

ANTICIPATIONS

"THIS certainly isn't any cinch!"

"I should say not! It's the hardest grind I was ever up against!"

"Well, you didn't expect to live in a perpetual camp, with nothing to do; did you?"

It was Sam Leland who gave utterance to the first remark, and Harry Houston who spoke the second, with a doleful shake of his head. And it was Tom Taylor who propounded the question.

The three new cadets, as our three friends were officially designated, though in reality they were called plebes, and would be for the next year to come, were in their barrack room, having just come in from a long and tiresome drill. They were taking what ease they could before they would again be called upon to take up some other of their new military duties.

"Camp! I should say it wasn't like camp!" exclaimed Sam. Shortly before the three chums had been telling one another some of their ex-

periences before they came to West Point, and all had agreed that the fun they had had while camping in the summer was best of all.

"Oh well, we'll have a taste of camp life here," observed Harry, as he looked around the room, to make sure it was in perfect order against the unexpected inspection of some "tac."

"Yes we'll have a taste of it, and that's about all!" Tom went on. "We'll have to drill harder than we do now, and we'll have to wait on some of the upper classmen like slaves."

"Oh well, I suppose it's good for what ails us," said Sam, with a sigh. "If the others went through with it I guess we can stand it."

"There's no getting out of it. We're here for four years, if we're lucky enough to stick," Tom ventured. "After all, we won't always be in the awkward squad."

"We were lucky enough not to be put in the 'goats,'" remarked Sam. "Well, I'm going to take it easy. Listen if you hear any one coming," and he took a restful position that would not allow him to spring easily to attention in case of the unexpected entrance of a "tac," but he depended on the sharp ears of his companions to warn him.

The boys, as I have said, had just come in from some hard drilling. This necessary instruction had begun as soon as they had formally been sworn in as subjects of the United States. Four

hours a day were devoted to "setting-up" exercises, the drill-masters being cadets from the upper classes, each one of whom was given charge over eight plebes.

And stern drill-masters they were, too, though perhaps not more so than the necessity required. Certainly a plebe is very awkward, compared with the military uprightness, sprightliness and precision of the finished cadet.

Tom never told his mother all he suffered, mentally and physically, during those first few weeks when he was being given the rudiments of a military education. He and his two companions who roomed together were forced to march here and there, back and forth, in all sorts of primary formations. They had to walk with chins drawn in, stomachs pulled up, with shoulders farther back than it seemed possible to force them, and they must never suffer themselves to slump out of this tiresome position. At least it was tiresome then, though later it became a fixed posture, that the trained cadet assumed naturally.

Then they had to march under a hot sun, and before the eyes of such chance visitors and excursionists as came to West Point, and these visitors did not always restrain their smiles or laughter at the antics of the awkward squad.

"I'd like to see how some of them would like it," complained Tom, after a particularly hard

drill, when he and his chums had detected a bevy of pretty girls smiling at them.

"They'll be glad enough, later, to have us ask 'em to a hop," said Sam.

"Huh! Catch me asking any of them!" commented Harry, vindictively.

It is no wonder the boys were mentally depressed the first few days after their ordeal began—mentally depressed and physically weary. They tried to realize that it was all for their good, but it was not easy.

"I thought we'd have some larks when we came here," observed Sam. "All the stories I ever read about life at West Point were lively."

"I guess some of the fellows who wrote those stories never came up as far as Newburgh," sighed Tom. "It isn't very lively."

It certainly was not. The new cadets did not have as much fun as they would have had at a boarding school or a college where there was not so much discipline. But on the one hand, this strict discipline was necessary as the basis of a military education, and on the other hand, there was scarcely a plebe who had the mental or physical energy to go out after any fun at the close of a day's drill, provided such fun could have been had without undue risk.

In fact, there was not much that could be done in the way of outside fun those first few weeks.

Every hour of the new cadet's life must be accounted for. His comings and goings had to be reported on the second. His superior officers must know where he was, and what he was doing, every minute of the day or night. And it was too much of a risk to "take any chances."

"I think we'll get the guns, to-day," observed Tom, one morning about a week after they had begun to receive their drill instructions.

"What makes you think so?" asked Sam.

"I heard some of the officers talking about it."

"Well, it will be something new to occupy us," went on Sam.

"Yes, another load to carry around in the broiling sun," said Harry, with a groan. "Just as if we didn't have enough now. Say, fellows," he went on, with a sigh, "do I bend over backwards when I stand up?" and he stood up straight and turned slowly around.

"Bend over backwards? What do you mean?" asked Tom.

"I mean I've been hollered at so much to 'straighten up' that I'm sure I must be getting curvature of the spine the wrong way."

"They certainly do throw it into us," observed Tom, sympathetically.

"All that fierce drill-master of ours can think to call us is 'wooden' and 'gross'," went on Harry. "I'm sick of the sound of it. But may-

but if we get the guns it won't be so bad. It'll be a change, anyhow, and give 'em a chance to ring in some new terms of abuse.

Up to now the new cadets had drilled without weapons. But that day, as Tom had anticipated, rifles were issued to those farthest advanced, including our three friends. The "plebes" were divided into squads, the least proficient being dubbed "goats" and Tom and his chums rejoiced that this was not their fate.

It was the first day of the drill with arms, and what little knowledge the boys seemed to have previously acquired appeared to be oozing away from them, as they were told how to handle the rifles.

The cadet drill-master waxed wroth, and when Tom saw, coming toward the squad he was in, Captain Hawkesbury, with a look of contempt on his flushed face, our hero thought to himself:

"Here's where we get it."

And they did. The old army officer, whatever else he was, was a good soldier and disciplinarian, and he and the cadet officer put the plebes through their paces without mercy.

Whether it was Tom's fault or not, or whether Captain Hawkesbury singled him out, was not apparent, but, at any rate, Tom received more reprimands than any of the others. Captain Hawkesbury spoke sharply, almost insultingly, so

that even the cadet lieutenant looked surprised. But Captain Hawkesbury was his superior officer, having been engaged for just such special instruction work.

"He sure has it in for me," mused Tom, after an especially sharp rebuke. "I've got to expect a lot of this, I suppose, because I beat Clarence out in the test. I wonder where Clarence is, anyhow?"

The nephew had left West Point when it became apparent that Tom had made good, and he had not been seen since.

Again and again Captain Hawkesbury, either intentionally or otherwise, showed his enmity against Tom as the day's drilling proceeded. And it culminated when Tom made a slight mistake in following a complicated order.

"Mr. Taylor, you seem deliberately trying to do this wrong!" snapped Captain Hawkesbury. "Report at my office after dismissal!"

Tom knew better than to show any resentment. But when he left his chums to obey the command later, his heart was filled with apprehensions.

CHAPTER XI

A LARK

CAPTAIN HAWKESBURY received Tom with a grim smile. In his heart Tom felt a deep dislike for this man who, in some manner or other, had so profited by Mr. Taylor's tangled property affairs.

It was an open secret in and around Chester that Captain Hawkesbury and Aaron Doolittle had made a small fortune simply out of the sale of the land to the railroad company, for instead of taking all cash they had been given certain shares in the company, which shares had doubled in value very shortly.

"And my mother might have had those shares if things—well, if things had gone differently," mused Tom. "I wonder if there's any chance of ever getting back part of that money—or having a claim on the land which the railroad company would have to settle for with us?"

Tom had often had these thoughts, but he was no day-dreamer, and the hard realities of life left him little time to indulge in such speculations.

"I guess I'll just have to grind along until I graduate," he mused. "Then I may make enough so that mother won't have to work any more."

He, as well as the other cadets at West Point, was paid a small salary while studying, the money being held for them until the completion of their four years' service.

"I'll have that to start with, anyhow," Tom reasoned, as he faced the grim old army officer.

"Mr. Taylor," began Captain Hawkesbury, in rasping tones, "you don't seem to show the right spirit at drill."

"I'm sure I didn't mean to do anything out of the way, sir," Tom replied, after his salute.

"Don't answer me back!" was the snapping retort. "You haven't a good carriage. I think I can improve it. Stand up straight now and I'll give you some exercises. Straighter!" was the sharp order, and Tom threw back his shoulders until he had a pain in the middle of his back.

And then for over an hour Captain Hawkesbury made him stand in a strained position, at times ordering him to go through certain exercises, more tiring than the standing. And all the while there was a mean grin on the face of the crabbed old man. He seemed to take delight in Tom's discomfiture, and no doubt he did. He was strictly within his rights—Tom knew that—but, none the less, our hero was sure the ordeal he had

to go through was devised solely as a personal punishment to gratify the spleen of Captain Hawkesbury because Tom had defeated the captain's nephew.

Tom was as limp as a rag when he was allowed to go back to his room, and his chums commiserated with him as he told them of what he had gone through.

"The old scab!" ejaculated Sam.

"We ought to haze him!" declared Harry.

"I'm afraid you won't get a chance to do that," Tom said. "The only thing for me to do is to keep as much out of his way as possible. And that isn't going to be easy. This is certainly fierce!" and he drooped his aching shoulders to ease them from the long strain.

"Cheer up! There's a little relief in sight," Harry said.

"What's that?" Tom asked.

"Orders have been published saying we're to go to camp. It will be different there, at least."

"Good!" Tom cried, animation showing on his face. "It's getting too hot in barracks."

The new cadets had had three weeks of almost constant drilling, in setting-up exercises, marching, and the manual of arms; and now came a change. Each lad received four pairs of white duck trousers, in anticipation of camp life, at least that number being necessary to enable them to look neat,

for the white material soiled quickly, and neatness is one of the fundamental requirements at West Point.

Up to now the new cadets had not mingled in the least with the upper classmen. There would be no association for the following year, it being the policy at the Military Academy to keep the first-year men separated from the second, third and fourth year classes. But though there would be no mingling there would be more or less association in camp with the third and fourth year men. The second class was on furlough, there being but one during the four years' course, coming at the conclusion of the second year.

Divided into companies, according to the height of the men, Tom and his friends were marched over to camp, where the white tents, in precise rows, nestled under the shade of the maple trees near the banks of the historic Hudson. The "plebes" had been looking toward it for some time with longing eyes, but it was a place they were forbidden to approach until sent there to spend part of the summer receiving instruction.

With brooms, buckets, bedding and personal property, the new cadets tramped over the cavalry plain toward the rows of cool and inviting-looking tents. Naturally the arrival of the "plebes" attracted the attention of the upper classmen, who indulged in all manner of good-

natured gibes against the unfortunates. This went on until the new lads were divided off into different companies.

As but two cadets would occupy the same tent Tom, Harry and Sam were to be separated. But only one tent apart, they were glad to note. Tom and Sam bunked together, while Harry went in with a lad named Chad Wilson, from New Jersey, a lad to whom Tom and his chums had taken a great liking.

"Well, now let's get straightened out," Tom suggested to Sam, as they piled their belongings on the floor of the tent. Some of the older cadets kindly showed our friends how to sling their "stretchers," a canvas holder that hung from the ridge-pole of the tent. In this stretcher is put clothing and everything that cannot be gotten in the lockers that stand on the floor. The tent of Tom and Sam was soon in proper and perfect shape for inspection.

"Say, they're all right—those fellows!" exclaimed Sam, as the two upper classmen left, having spent some time showing him and Tom how to arrange their tent. "I like them."

"Don't let 'em know it," advised Tom.

"Why not?"

"Because they'll freeze to us and make us their 'special duty' men. They probably will anyhow."

"What's 'special duty' men?" Sam wanted to know.

"You'll find out soon enough."

And Sam did. A little later he and Tom were detailed to keep in order the tent of the two third-year cadets who had showed them how to arrange their bedding that first day. And for the remainder of that camp the two "plebes" were obliged to do all sorts of services for the upper classmen, from making contraband lemonade to going on errands and writing their less important letters.

In exchange the protection of the upper-class cadets was thrown around their special duty men. No other cadet was allowed to utilize their services, nor even to haze them mildly. And Tom and Sam also were given much friendly advice, help in their studies, and acquired some cast-off, but very good, clothing that came in very handy for lads whose spending money was limited.

So life at camp began, and it was a welcome change, in a way, from the former system of drilling. Not that it was any easier, for the plebes had much to learn. More than once did Tom fall under the stern eye of Captain Hawkesbury, who seemed to single our hero out for special reproof.

One day when Tom was sent to the old army officer's tent, he saw, on a table amid a pile of other letters, one that bore the scrawling signa-

ture of Aaron Doolittle. A puff of wind blew the epistle to the floor, and Tom, who picked it up, could not help seeing part of one sentence.

These words seemed fairly to stare out at him:

"The Railroad Company is not altogether satisfied about bridge land title. We'll have to get together on it soon."

"Now what in the world can that mean?" thought Tom, as he placed the letter back with the others. "If I could only get a good lawyer to take up our case I might find there was something coming to my mother from that land. But I guess it isn't of much use. Poor mother! If Captain Hawkesbury knows anything about any money due us he's keeping it mighty secret."

But Tom's speculations concerning the strange meaning of the sentence in the letter were brought to an abrupt end, at least for the time being, that same night.

There had been hard and gruelling drill, and a mild spirit of revolt was abroad among some of the "plebes." Word was passed around that a lark was in prospect. Some of the boys were going to play a trick on one or two of the sentries. Tom had a chance to go in on it but refused, and he was glad, later, that he had stayed out.

For the lark was a fizzle. The sentries had been informed beforehand about the trick, and nearly captured those who intended to take their

guns away from them. The officer of the day, the officer of the guard and the sergeant came out on the alarm and a chase of the luckless cadets resulted.

Tom was in his tent when Sam entered hurriedly, barely managing to slip in past the sentinel in the Company street.

"Narrow squeak!" Sam murmured. "Mum's the word, Tom, old man."

"Sure!" Tom answered. In the next tent he could hear Harry and Chad going in hurriedly, to undress and get into bed before a general inspection was made.

And hardly had Sam pulled the clothes over him before one of the sentries with a dark-lantern came in.

Sam gave an audible snore, and Tom followed his example.

CHAPTER XII

TOM'S REFUSAL

"MIGHTY good sleepers in here!" muttered the sentry as he flashed his lantern in the faces of Tom and Sam. "Mighty good!"

He was an experienced man, and, doubtless, had played the same trick himself many a time. He stooped and looked under the cots where the shoes of the "plebes" should have been. Tom knew what was going on and he felt sure that Sam must have left his soil-begrimed shoes in plain sight.

But Tom had not given his tent-mate credit for some common sense. Sam had guessed that shoes would be looked at, since there was some mud about the camp that day. So Sam had put his shoes in his locker, and had taken out a clean pair which he put at the foot of his cot.

The sentry grunted as he detected no signs of mud on the leather, and again flashed his light in

the faces of the two lads, having, by a quick look, ascertained that the tent was in proper order.

"Um!" grunted the sentry, as he was about to leave, baffled.

"Eh? What's that? Who's here? What's the trouble?" asked Sam, pretending to awaken suddenly and blinking his eyes at the light. "I say, Tom!" he went on, with an air of innocence that became him well. "Something's going on all right!"

"There'll be more before there's less," growled the sentry. "Mighty innocent, you two!"

He went out and Tom and Sam refrained from talk for some time, for they realized that he might come sneaking softly back to overhear any words that might give him a clue.

At last, however, as several minutes passed, and nothing happened, Sam ventured to whisper, and told Tom all that had occurred. Though Tom was not in on the lark he had all the facts, and knew those who had taken part in it.

For some time search went on through the streets of white tents but, as far as could be learned, none of the culprits was discovered. Finally quiet settled down over the camp, and Tom and Sam really slept.

The next morning, of course, there was an effort made to discover those responsible for the attempted outrage, as Captain Hawkesbury

termed it. He was one of the chief investigators, and he stormed around, telling what he would do to the culprits when he discovered them.

"But first you've got to catch them," murmured Harry, who had, like Sam, escaped by a narrow margin. "Nobody will peach."

Of course that was not to be thought of, and the code of morals at West Point would allow of no lying. If any of the guilty ones had been asked directly if he had taken part in the fracas of the night, not one would have denied it.

But it was not the policy of the investigators to ask the direct question. They wanted to be in a position to make an accusation, have the necessary evidence, and then mete out the just punishment. That is, it was the policy of all but one man, and that was the old army officer, Captain Hawkesbury. Whether he had forgotten the code of morals to which he had formerly subscribed when at West Point or whether he chose to ignore it, was not plain.

At any rate he seemed determined to find out, by hook or crook, who were the guilty ones, and he took the meanest method of doing this. He sent for Tom and demanded to know of him whether or not Sam, Harry or Chad had had a part in the night's lark.

At first Tom was too surprised to answer. Though he had not been long at West Point he

realized that this questioning, to make one cadet report on another, was without precedent.

"I refuse to answer, Captain Hawkesbury," Tom said.

"What! You dare refuse me?"

"I feel that I must."

"Then you know some of the guilty ones?" and the old officer leered up into Tom's face.

"I refuse to answer that also."

"It won't do you any good. I have positive information that you know the guilty ones, and I demand that you give me their names!"

"And I, much as I regret it, respectfully refuse," said Tom, firmly.

"Then I'll make you tell!" declared the captain in angry passion.

Tom felt that he was in trouble.

For a moment or two the man who had so benefited by Tom's father's money—legally or illegally—seemed to be considering the case. Then he appeared to make up his mind.

"Six hours of guard duty as a starter!" he snapped. "If that doesn't bring you to your senses I'll try something else. If you want to tell," he went on, in a wheedling tone, "I will be in a position to get you some special privileges. Perhaps even a furlough."

This was almost unheard of for a plebe, and Tom knew it. He also knew that Captain

Hawkesbury had some underhand power, but whether he could exert it over army officers, however much he might with politicians, was a matter of conjecture.

"Are you going to tell?" he demanded, banging his fist down on his table so that the papers danced.

"No, sir," answered Tom, quietly.

"Then go on guard! I'll see you later!" was the cold retort.

Doing guard duty on a hot day, in a stiff uniform, carrying a heavy gun in the broiling sun, is not an easy task. Tom found it very trying, but not for an instant did he falter in his determination to refuse to tell what he knew.

His companions waxed indignant, and there was a hurried meeting of the "plebes." The guilty ones offered to confess to save Tom from further punishment, but he heard of it, and refused to accept the sacrifice.

"I can stick it out!" he said.

"But what if there is more to come?" asked Sam. "He may lock you up as a prisoner, and cut off every privilege."

"Let him," said Tom.

But Captain Hawkesbury did not go that far. Whether he dared not, or whether those higher in authority stepped in and released Tom, never became known.

Certain it was that Tom was relieved from guard duty, and nothing was said about further punishment. He went to his tent worn out and weary, but his spirit was not broken, and he had not told.

"But he'll be more my enemy than ever," mused Tom, for he felt that the old army officer would be chagrined that he could not inflict some punishment on the guilty ones.

However, those taking part in the frolic, were never officially known, and the matter passed into West Point history, with other similar cases.

Meanwhile, the drill work at the camp went on, and Tom was beginning to feel that he was slowly getting on to the road which would lead him to his place as an officer in the United States army. From time to time he wondered how his mother was getting on. He had letters, of course, and they seemed to be bright and cheery ones. But Tom knew that even if she suffered she would write that way.

"Hang it all!" he would exclaim. "If I could only get hold of some money for her—some of the money I feel sure father must have left. But where is it?"

Then would come the memory of that letter in the tent of Captain Hawkesbury.

CHAPTER XIII

ACROSS THE RIVER

THE FOURTH OF JULY was looked forward to by all the cadets, the plebes no less than the upper classmen. To all it meant a day when most of the duties were suspended, and to the "plebes" it marked the time when some of them, for the first time, would be chosen to go on guard. Not all the plebes would be selected for this, but Tom learned that he and Sam would be. Harry and Chad had to wait a while for the coveted honor.

On the morning of Independence Day, following an old-time custom, the West Point band marched through the streets of tents at reveille. After this all duties were suspended for the day. A patriotic concert was given in the morning, with the firing of a national salute at noon, and then came an extra good dinner served in honor of the occasion.

Few and far between were the privileges accorded the plebes, those most lowly of the West Pointers. But in some manner, on this Independence Day, unusual permission was given to the

lowest division of cadets to go, with certain restrictions, where they pleased in the afternoon, provided they were back by a certain hour.

"Say, this hits me just about right!" exclaimed Sam to Tom, as the two came back to their tent after dinner. "What do you say that we get a boat and go across the river to Garrison and feel as if we could call our souls our own for a while."

"I'm with you, if it'll be allowed," said Tom.

"Sure it'll be allowed!" his chum asserted. "We'll get Harry and Chad, hire a boat, and have a real lark for once."

"Go as far as you like," laughed Tom, "only I haven't got much cash."

"We don't need much. I have plenty, as it happens—just by luck more than anything else," he added quickly. For he was the son of a wealthy broker, and had much spending money. However, a "plebe" has little chance to spend money, so Tom was no worse off than any of his companions. In fact, in spite of what is said about the democracy of many colleges, it is only at West Point that the absolute lack of money makes no difference at all. Money is really not given a consideration. It is comradeship, worth, and brains that count.

Never since he had arrived had Tom, even for a moment, been made to feel that he was looked down on because of his poverty. And he had no

doubt but that his lack of spending money was well known to all his companions.

"We'll have a bang-up good time!" went on Sam. "All the ice cream and lemonade we want for once!"

Both he and Tom were very mild in their desire for pleasures, as were Harry and Chad. The two latter eagerly welcomed the chance to get away for a while from the daily grind, and the necessary permission having been secured, they went to hire the boat to row across the Hudson.

As yet Tom had had little opportunity to look at the many points of interest around West Point, with its Revolutionary associations, and the part it played in the treason of Arnold. He made up his mind that some day he would take the time to visit all these spots and see those which history had made famous.

The four chums started off together, bent on having a good time. Money rattled in the pockets of Sam, at least. As a matter of fact, cadets are not supposed to have any cash. Things they need are charged against their monthly salary, and should they desire a picture taken, or wish to buy some candy, they have to submit a permit credit for the necessary amount. Thus the real need of money is done away with. But of course every cadet is more or less surreptitiously supplied by his family, so that occasionally a bit of

"boodle" may be purchased, that being the cadet term for all contraband eatables.

Our friends were not the only ones who went to the river for a row that pleasant Fourth of July. But only a few, including Tom and his three chums, went to Garrison.

How they enjoyed the delights of doing, in a measure, as they pleased, without having to march along as stiff as ramrods, without having some corporal yell "more yet" in their ears, meaning thereby to straighten up more yet, or draw in their chins more yet—how they enjoyed the delights of this freedom may easily be imagined.

They laughed and joked, made fun of each other and their fellow cadets, talked as familiarly as they liked of their superior officers, from the "Supe," as the superintendent of the Academy and the highest official is known, down to the "Com," or commandant of cadets.

It was all pure joy and delight—at least for a time.

Reaching Garrison the boys tied up their boat and made their way through the streets of the town. They met several other cadets—upper classmen, but the latter took no notice of the "plebes" nor did the latter dare so much as look at the "superior beings." Such has custom decreed.

"This looks like a good place to go in and

have a feed of ice cream," suggested Sam, as they passed a place where tables were set in the open air under some trees and vines growing over a pergola.

"Go to it," advised Tom. "I'm hot and dry."

They marched in and gave their orders, noticing as they did so that the ice cream garden joined one attached to a cafe, where something stronger than water and grape juice was sold.

Somewhat to the surprise of Tom and his chums they saw several older cadets in this other summer garden, sitting about tables drinking and smoking.

"They're hitting the pace," murmured Harry.

"Yes, but don't let them see us looking at them," advised Tom. "It won't do, you know."

The "plebes" knew their places well.

The four friends were enjoying their cream, and wondering what next they could do to help pass the day, when Tom, whose back was toward the cafe garden, heard his name spoken loudly.

"Sit down!" some one exclaimed.

Tom looked around and saw Clarence Hawkesbury at a table where sat some upper classmen.

Clarence seemed a bit unsteady on his feet. His face was flushed and he pointed a wavering finger at Tom.

"There he is!" he said. "There's the fellow who did me out of my trick at West Point. If it

wasn't for him I'd be with you now—with you, my friends," and he waved his hand to include the older cadets.

"Sit down!" some of them advised him. Others laughed. They were all rather noisy and hilarious.

"I—I'll fix him," Clarence continued.

Young Hawkesbury strode over toward Tom's table.

"He's coming," said Sam in a low voice. "Want to duck out?"

"I did not!" exclaimed Tom.

"That's right—stick! We're with you!" Chad said.

"I'll fix him!" Clarence muttered.

"Oh, come on back! Sit down! Don't be foolish!" his friends advised him. But Clarence was hot-headed just then. Unsteadily, he strode over to Tom's chair. By this time Tom had arisen, for there was a foreboding look of anger on the face of his enemy.

"There! That's one I owe you!" Clarence exclaimed. He aimed a blow at Tom. It only fell lightly, but Tom was not one to take a blow like that and not reply.

The next instant his fist shot out, met the chin of Clarence squarely with a resounding crack, and the insulting youth fell backward on the grass, lying prone.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EXPLOSION

So suddenly had the "fracas," as the boys referred to it afterward, taken place, that for the moment no one, not even Tom, knew what to do or say. They all remained, in strained attitudes of surprise, looking at Clarence.

Tom had acted instinctively in striking out, the instinct that causes every lad to want to hit back, once he is hit. In reality there was little of real anger back of Tom's blow. But it had been effective, that was evident.

"He certainly can hit some," one of the older cadets remarked in a low voice.

"A good, straight blow," murmured another.

As yet, strictly following precedent, the upper classmen had given no indication that they so much as knew a "plebe" existed.

Clarence now sat up slowly, with a dazed look on his face. Some of his companions could not refrain from smiling. They did not altogether sympathize with Clarence, it seemed. It developed afterward that they were certain wealthy

cadets whose acquaintance young Hawkesbury had made the previous summer at a fashionable resort.

"Who—who hit me?" Clarence demanded, as he rubbed his chin, on which showed a dull red mark.

"I did," Tom answered, not a whit afraid. He was quite willing to do the same thing over again if he had to.

"Oh, you—you hit me—did you?" went on Clarence. His brain seemed dull of comprehension.

"Yes," said Tom. "But you struck me first, if you remember."

"Huh! I did, eh? Well, I'll hit you again, that's what I will. I'll show you—"

Clarence struggled to his feet, but some of the cadets with him gathered around him.

"Say, you don't know enough to quit when you've had enough," said one. "He'll only knock you down again. You're in no condition to fight."

"That's right, Hawkesbury. Take it easy," advised another. "What do you want to mix things up for?"

"Why he's the fellow who did me out of my appointment—my West Point place—he did it—Tom Taylor!" and he pointed a wavering finger at our hero.

"Well if he got the appointment it was because he won it fair and square," said a tall, quiet cadet. "That's the only way one can get into West Point. Forget it, Hawkesbury. You've had enough."

"Yes, come on down to the river," suggested another. "A little trip on the water will do us all good. It must be getting close to grub time, too. Come along."

Some of them linked their arms in those of Clarence, and began to urge him out of the summer garden. The little clash had not attracted much attention, as it was all over so soon.

"I—I'll fix him yet!" muttered Clarence, vindictively. But he allowed himself to be led away by his cadet friends. Perhaps the memory of that stinging blow on his chin was a persuader.

"Well, you came out of that all right, Tom," observed Sam, when the other party, rather noisy and hilarious, had gone away. All the while the other cadets had followed the custom that has prevailed from time immemorial, and did not bestow the slightest look of recognition on the "plebes." But Tom and his friends were used to that by this time, and expected it.

"Yes, I'm sorry I had to hit him, but it was the only way," Tom said. "And I thought, while I was about it, I might as well make it a good one."

"That's the ticket!" Chad said. "He sure

is a cad, that Clarence fellow. What's his game, anyhow?"

"Just plain revenge and meanness, I think," Tom answered. "His uncle is Captain Hawkesbury, you know."

"Better not let him know you knocked his precious nephew down, or he'll make it hot for you," suggested Harry.

"Oh, he'll probably hear of it," said Tom, a little apprehensively, "but I'll be on my guard not to get caught, just the same."

They finished their cream, and then sat for a while in the cool shade of the summer garden, enjoying to the full the rest from drill and other duties at the Academy.

It was a respite that would not occur again for a year, perhaps longer, if any of them happened to be caught in some scrape that would curtail their holiday privileges.

And, as has been explained, they would not be allowed a furlough until they had completed two years at West Point. This time seemed so far off that none of them dared think of it.

"Well, let's go out around town," suggested Harry, after a while. "We want to take in all the sights. Not that they're so many, but they mean a heap to us 'plebes.' Come along."

"What about a moving picture show?" asked Sam.

"Have we time?" Tom asked.

"To see part of one, anyhow," was the opinion of Chad. So, having paid their score, they strolled out. They saw nothing of Clarence or his cronies, and a little later our friends were seated in a small moving picture place, enjoying the reels of comedy and tragedy.

They still had an hour or so of liberty left after coming out of the exhibition before they were due at the Academy, a special privilege having been granted all save those being punished for some infraction of the rules. These unfortunates were not allowed to leave the limits of the military reservation.

"No need to be in a rush," observed Chad, as he noticed Tom heading for the place where they had left their boat.

"Well, I'd rather be back a little ahead of time than after it," was Tom's comment.

"So had I," came from Sam.

"We've got time for an ice cream soda, anyhow," was Harry's invitation to the other boys.

"And as it will be a long while before we'll have a chance at another, I move you, Mr. President, that we take advantage of this generous offer!" exclaimed Chad.

"The motion prevails," said Tom, and they marched to a drug store.

When they reached, a little later, the place

where they had left their boat, Tom and his friends saw, just ahead of them, Clarence and the cadets who had been with him during the unpleasantness in the summer garden.

"Hold on—wait a minute," advised Tom, holding back. "Let's wait until they get out of the way."

"You're not afraid of him, are you?" asked Harry.

"No, but I don't want to get into another fight here. One of us might go into the water, and I don't want it to be me," Tom said, with a smile.

"That's right. It wouldn't look very well reporting back all wet," agreed Harry.

"They've got a motor boat," remarked Sam, as they saw Clarence and the cadets preparing to enter a fine gasoline craft.

"Yes, that belongs to Captain Hawkesbury," Tom said. He could not keep back a certain bitter feeling in his heart that he should be so poor as not to be able to afford a craft of this kind, while the other lad had one. "And, maybe, if the truth were known," reflected Tom, "it was bought with the money my father might have made on that railroad land deal."

Laughing and talking loudly, the older cadets and Clarence entered the motor craft. The engine started with a roar, then slowed down, and again burst into a series of explosions.

"What's up?" asked Harry, as they were getting ready to take out their own rowboat.

"Oh, they're just monkeying with it," said Tom. "It looks as though Clarence were trying to show how much he knows, or doesn't know, about a motor boat."

"Well, he'd better watch his step," observed Harry. "The river isn't any too smooth to-day."

What with the current and wind the Hudson was not as smooth as a millpond. But Clarence and his chums, the cadets, seemed to have no anxiety. They did not start off immediately from the dock, but ran the boat up and down, Clarence evidently letting his friends try their hands at steering and experimenting with the engine.

"There they go. Now let's start," suggested Tom. "They can't run us down now, and claim it was an accident."

Slowly the rowboat made its way after the motor launch. Tom and his chums were discussing the experiences of the day, wondering what the morrow would bring forth, and dwelling on the good time they had enjoyed, when suddenly there was a muffled report just ahead of them.

They all looked up, startled, and Tom cried:

"It's an explosion; On that motor boat!"

Looking to where he pointed they saw a cloud of smoke hovering over the craft containing Clarence Hawkesbury and the cadets.

CHAPTER XV

HARD WORK.

"SHE's on fire!" cried Sam.

"A goner!" echoed Harry.

"Steady all!" exclaimed Tom, in as calm a tone as he could command at that critical time. "Steady all! And give way—hard!"

They all knew what he meant. That they were to row to the rescue of those in the motor boat, where something had exploded—just what, whether merely a carbureter, filled with gasoline, or the main tank, could not be ascertained. Certain it was that Clarence and those other cadets seemed to be in great danger. They were standing up in the bow of the craft now, as far away from the smoke and, presumably, the flames, as they could get, and were shouting and waving their arms.

"Row hard!" ordered Tom, and he seemed, naturally, to take command.

They had a six-oared barge, and Tom, as it happened, was at the stern, in charge of the tiller lines when the explosion occurred. He retained

his place, and headed the craft directly for the one now enshrouded in smoke.

"Row hard, boys!" he cried.

"That's the idea!" said Sam, in jerky tones, as he bent his back to the oars. Each cadet had two of the light cedar blades. They had been rowing slowly, but they now worked up the pace as though training for a championship.

The result was that the craft fairly shot through the water, rough as it was. Tom and his chums, in their barge, were nearer than any other boats to the burning one.

"Do they see us coming?" asked Sam, whose back, as were those of Harry and Chad, was toward the motor boat.

"They seem to be too excited to notice what's going on," replied Tom, as he shifted the course a trifle. "But we'll get there in time—I hope."

He added the last words in a low tone, for, even as he spoke, there sounded another dull and more muffled, explosion from the motor boat, and a larger pall of smoke rolled up.

"They're going to jump," cried Sam, who, in the bow, gave a hasty look over his shoulder.

"Wait!" yelled Tom, seeing the evident intention of Clarence. He was poised on the gun-whale of the burning boat ready to dive, but the cadets seemed to be trying to put out the fire.

"We'll be with you in a minute!" Tom added.

This time his voice carried, and that he was heard was evident, as some of the cadets waved their hands to him. One of them was seen to grasp Clarence.

"There's time enough yet not to jump, though maybe it would be safer," said Harry. "They can all swim I guess."

Swimming was an accomplishment insisted on at West Point, as was dancing, and it was not to be doubted that the cadets were adepts at it. As for Clarence, Tom knew the youth was quite at home in the water.

So aside from the chance that some of them might be taken with a cramp, or weighted down with water-soaked clothing, there was really no particular danger in jumping overboard.

There was one chance, though, that in leaping out suddenly they might capsize the motor boat, and if water entered the cockpit, it would spread the burning gasoline. That is the risk of bringing water in contact with a gasoline fire. It must never be used; sand or some proper chemical being called for in that emergency.

"Give way—a little more!" Tom called. He was not at all selfish in this. Had he been at the oars, and one of his companions at the tiller lines, he would have pulled with all his strength. The proper directing of the craft and the urging of it forward are equally important.

"Way she is!" panted Sam.

"Watch yourselves now," Tom cautioned them, as they neared the burning craft. "I'm going to put us around so the smoke will blow away from us. We'll take 'em all in our boat if they can't put out the fire."

"I guess we can hold 'em," said Chad. "We'll probably have to take 'em anyhow, for even if they douse the blaze, the boat will be stalled."

"Steady now!" called Tom. He sent the rowboat close to the bow of the motor craft, in such a position that the smoke would be blown away from the rescuing party.

"What's the trouble?" called Tom, as some of the other cadets put out their hands to grasp the gunwhale of the rowboat.

"Explosion—carbureter," was the short answer of one of the cadets. At last the time-honored rule of an upper classman's not speaking to a cadet, outside of the Academy grounds, had been broken. But there was good excuse for it.

"Hurry up! Get me aboard! I don't want to be burned!" cried Clarence, and brushing aside some of the cadets he had invited to ride in his motor boat, he fairly jumped into the rowing craft.

"Easy there!" was Tom's caution, as the barge rocked and swayed under the impact.

"The cad!" murmured one of the upper class-

men under his breath, as he shot a vindictive look at Clarence. The latter had saved himself, at any rate. He was not a very gallant host, to say the least.

"Let the boat go, fellows! he called. "Save yourselves!"

"Can't you put out the fire?" asked Tom.

"We used up all the chemical extinguisher there was on board," explained one of the cadets. "I guess she'll have to burn."

The gasoline was burning and flickering under and about the flooded carburetor. At any moment it might run along the copper supply pipe, or melt it. The tank would then explode.

"Guess we can't do anything more, fellows," said one of the cadets, regretfully enough, for the motor boat was a fine craft.

"No, get aboard," Tom said. "If we only had some sand we might put it out."

Clarence sat huddled up in the rowboat, a picture of varying emotions. He did not look at Tom.

By this time, however, several other boats on the river had come up, some of them being motor craft. One was well supplied with chemical extinguishers, and, at considerable risk, the men aboard it began to fight the fire in Clarence's boat.

Tom, his chums, and the other cadets helped,

but Clarence himself remained as far away from danger as he could.

Finally the fire was put out, without great damage having been done, though the burned boat was unable to run under its own power.

"Will you let us have the honor of putting you ashore?" asked Tom, of the cadet who seemed to be the leader of the little party with Clarence, "or do you—"

"Thanks very much, old man. If you'll row us over to the Point we'll appreciate it. It's about time we reported back. What do you want done with this boat of yours, anyhow, Hawkesbury?" he asked of Clarence, a bit sharply.

"Oh, I don't care," was the sullen answer.

"This gentleman says he'll tow it to a repair dock if you say so."

"Yes, I suppose that will be best," Clarence said. He did not seem to have sense enough to express his thanks. But the cadets did this for him, apologizing for the condition of the youth.

Then, when the disabled boat was being towed up the river, Tom and his chums rowed the upper classmen and Clarence to the West Point shore of the Hudson.

"Thanks very much, fellows," said the older cadets to Tom and his chums, as they disembarked. "You did us a good turn all right, and we shan't forget it."

The thanks were formal, and, as soon as expressed, the same cold and distant manner that always marked the difference between the plebes and the others was resumed. But Tom and his chums understood. They had made some lasting friends that day.

Clarence Hawkesbury, however, did not stop to thank those who had saved him from possible injury, if not death. As soon as the rowboat touched the dock he sneaked off, too mean to utter a decent word.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked one of the upper classmen of another.

"I'd hate to tell you," was the rejoinder. "This is the last time I'll go out with that cad!"

"Same here!"

And so the little incident passed into history.

Now began a period of hard work for Tom and his chums. Following the Fourth of July they were assigned to guard duty for the first time. Some of the new cadets were on duty all night, and every half-hour the call had to be passed along, the number of the post being given, with the words:

"All's well!"

It was as near to war conditions as the boys were likely to approach in some time.

Drills were now frequent, and were of various kinds; company drill, with field guns, in which no horses were used at first, mortar battery drill,

battalion drill, and so on. The boys were tired many times during the days and nights spent in camp, but they all realized that it was for their good, that it was what they had come to West Point to learn, and that it was very necessary, if they were to become soldiers.

Tom sometimes wished he could take part with the older classes in building pontoon bridges, and in the practical military engineering, which consisted in mounting guns temporarily, making hasty entrenchments, temporary fortifications, barbed-wire entanglements, and so on.

But this was only for the upper classmen, and he realized that his turn would come soon enough. As for the "plebes" they had a daily routine that was rather dull, and often consisted in doing work in preparation for the evolutions and practice of the higher classes.

Dancing and swimming lessons were a part of the work, and it may be guessed that on hot days there was no inducement needed to get the boys into the water. It was not quite so with the dancing, however. Even though some of them were good dancers already, it was little fun whirling about with another plebe wearing a white handkerchief on his arm, to indicate that he was a "lady."

But it all had to be done, and Tom rather liked it.

CHAPTER XVI

ON FURLOUGH

TOM had frequent letters from his mother, and in turn he sent her long accounts of his life at West Point. He emphasized the best points only, leaving out all references to the hard work, unless he could give a humorous turn to it, which he frequently did.

He did not mention his trouble with Clarence, and made light of the rescue of the boys from the burning motor boat. This was in case she might see something of it in the papers. It was reported in some of the New York journals, but, as Tom afterward learned, was not printed in his home town.

Indirectly Tom learned that Clarence had his motor boat repaired and went to Florida with it.

"Well, that'll take him out of the way here for some time," commented Sam, on hearing the news.

"Yes, he isn't a fellow I take to," added Harry.

Tom, too, was glad his enemy was, even temporarily, away from West Point.

"I don't want to be selfish," Tom said, "but I hope he doesn't come to this Academy when I'm here."

The time was approaching when camp would be broken, and the cadets return to barracks. Though in a measure some looked forward to this, as welcoming any change, Tom knew it meant harder mental work in their studies, though he and his chums would be freed from the labor required of them in waiting on the upper classmen. Then, too, it would be a change, and change of any sort was welcome at this stage of a plebe's life.

So life in camp went on as usual with the final day approaching nearer and nearer each twenty-four hours. The annual illumination of the camp, which is timed for about a week before it breaks up, was a gala event. Hundreds of Japanese lanterns were hung about the tents, which were otherwise decorated, and there was music of different varieties supplied by the talented cadets. The band played also, and there were visitors galore.

Tom did not receive any company, though his chums had sisters and girl friends and relatives who came for the occasion. But Mrs. Taylor wrote that she was unable to come, and Tom

could guess the reason why—a lack of money.

“Hang it all!” he exclaimed disconsolately, “I wish I could hurry up and get rich—quick.”

But few persons do that, except in stories, and they, as the little boy said, don’t count.

“If I could only get hold of some of father’s former wealth we’d be on Easy Street,” mused Tom.

He thought of how Captain Hawkesbury and Aaron Doolittle had so easily profited by his father’s efforts, and a deep regret filled our hero’s heart. Of course Tom realized that his father might have mismanaged, and have made mistakes or unfortunate speculations, as men often do.

“But to think they profited by it, and then to have them treat us as they do galls me,” Tom went on to himself. “If I could only find out whether there was anything wrong—any deal between Hawkesbury and Doolittle—I might be able to get back something out of the wreck. But I guess they’re too foxy for me.”

Captain Hawkesbury’s evident dislike of Tom had not abated much. True the army captain could not do a great deal to Tom, but what little he could do he did, and it only takes a little additional, during a lad’s first year at West Point, to make him almost hate life. The only excuse is that it is excellent training for him.

Every time he had a chance Captain Hawkes-

bury made matters unpleasant for Tom, giving him extra hours of guard duty for the slightest infraction of rules. Be Tom's shoes never so brilliantly polished, his rifle never so shining, and his face never so cleanly shaved, he often was called to account for some fancied neglect. Others, as well, were reprimanded by different officers, but every one noticed that more than Tom's just share of reproof and punishment was meted out to him.

"I know what he's doing it for, too," Tom told his chums. "He hopes I'll withdraw and make a vacancy in our district so Clarence will have a chance. But I'm going to stick!" he declared with a grim tightening of his lips.

"That's right!" exclaimed Sam, clapping Tom heartily on the back.

And so life went on, not altogether evenly, but as happily as could be expected.

With the usual noise, shouting and hilarity the class that was on furlough—the second year men—came back with the usual ceremonies; marching up the hill from the station, and posing for their photograph on the chapel steps. Before this, however, they had been pulled and hauled about, to make their clothing and hats look more like the apparel of tramps than anything else. But that was part of the game.

Soon they had gone on to barracks, where they

donned their natty uniforms, and once again they took up life where they had left off. Two more years of it and they would graduate.

Tom looked at them longingly. Would he ever reach that point? It seemed very far off.

Finally came the day for breaking camp. The tents, the ropes of which had been previously loosed, fell as one at the tap of the drum, and a little later, piled in wagons, were being carted away with the paraphernalia. Then came the marching of the cadets back to barracks, and Tom and Sam went to the room that had been assigned to them, Harry and Chad being quartered near.

The room of Tom and his chum was plainly, even severely, furnished. It was as unlike the average college student's room as is possible to imagine. Not a sofa cushion was allowed, nothing but hard-bottomed chairs, and even the clock on the mantel, where must also be kept the official blue book of regulations, must not cost above a certain sum. There were no decorations, no pictures—nothing but bare, cheerless walls. It was military, and that was the best that could be said of it.

Tom and Sam had to take turns in keeping the room in order, each being held responsible on alternate weeks. They must do their sweeping, their dusting and the carrying of water. The

Biblical injunction to hew wood did not apply in their case.

There were two inspections to be provided for, one in the morning and one in the evening, and everything in the room, needless to say, must be spick and span in anticipation of this. There was a difference between Sunday and week-day inspections.

On the latter the cadets might be absent at drill or recitations when their rooms were looked at. In this case they did not see the inspector. But if they happened to be in when he made his round they could be in fatigue uniform, or if the inspection did not take place until after eleven o'clock in the morning, it was permitted to wear a dressing gown.

But the Sunday inspections are the critical ones. The cadets have to be in their rooms then, attired in their best dress coats and gloves without a speck. The slightest article out of place, or the least deviation from the regulations, causes the tactical officer to make an adverse report or "skin." The cadet captain is also present at these Sunday inspections.

There was a slight change in the routine after the return to barracks. Recitations began early in September, and the time of rising was put back a half hour, being at six o'clock. Breakfast was a half our later, guard mounting at seven-ten and

recitations, after the call to quarters, began at eight o'clock.

There were four recitation periods up to nearly one o'clock and the classes were so divided that while one section recited another studied.

Tom found it rather strange at first, to be under absolutely no set rules or requirements in regard to study. The cadets were allowed to fix their own standards in this respect. All that was required of them was that they be perfect in recitation.

Military discipline, of course, was insisted on. The instructors were all West Point graduates, the strictest of the strict, and not only must the cadets be perfect in their lessons, but in their manner, deportment and dress. Woe betide he whose shoes were not polished to just the proper degree of brilliancy, or who came in with a speck on his otherwise immaculate collar.

But Tom and his chums managed to worry through, somehow or other. They were not the most brilliant students, neither were they the lowest. In fact, they were a good average, and they were fairly well satisfied with themselves.

The work was hard—no one denied that. On the other hand the results were in keeping. It was worth all it cost—Tom felt sure of that.

Now and then the boys would be caught in some infraction of the rules—such as having a

light in their rooms at forbidden hours, even though they carefully darkened the windows. They were given extra tours of duty on Saturday afternoons for such things, when otherwise they might have been free to enjoy themselves.

In January would come the examinations for those who failed to qualify in class to a certain percentage. Tom and Chad were among the lucky ones who escaped the nerve-racking ordeal of a strict examination before the official board, but Sam and Harry were obliged to submit. However, they were successful, and breathed easier.

Some of the plebes were dropped, not coming up to the standard in the January tests, and were obliged to withdraw, giving their friends and relatives whatever excuse they thought best suited to the occasion.

"Well, we're here yet!" exclaimed Tom to his chums when it was all over.

"All here, what there is left of us," sighed Sam, who had come pretty close to failure in one study.

The examination days brought with them some spare time which the cadets enjoyed in outdoor sports.

And so, in the way already described, Tom passed two years at West Point. He had not seen his mother in all that time, though he heard from her often. You may judge, then, of his delight

when, having successfully passed his second year, he was allowed a furlough of two months to go back home.

"And I want to see you very much, Tom," Mrs. Taylor wrote. "I have something important to tell you."

"I wonder what it can be?" Tom mused, as he prepared to leave the Academy for a short time.

CHAPTER XVII

A QUARREL

"OH, Tom! How fine you look! How tall and straight you are! What a—why, what a *man* you have become!"

Thus our hero's mother greeted him as she met him at the Chester station on the occasion of Tom's first home-coming.

"Tom, you are so—so big!"

Her eyes were shining, as only a mother's eyes can shine, while she held out her hands to welcome her son.

"Well, Mother," Tom said, as he kissed her, "West Point makes a specialty of helping boys grow up. I hope they didn't make any mistake in my case."

"I'm sure they didn't!" she said. "You certainly are taller and straighter."

"It's a pity if I shouldn't be, mother, with all the bracing-back I've been doing in the last two years. For a time I thought I wouldn't have anything but shoulders, but I'm getting used to it now. How are you, and what's the news?"

"As if I could tell you all the news of two years in a moment!" she objected.

"Well, tell me about yourself. Are you getting along all right?"

As he asked this question Tom looked searchingly at his mother. He saw that she was thinner than she had been when he went away, and she looked paler—as though she had spent many long and weary hours bending over her sewing. And, had Tom but known it, this was the fact.

In a way he bitterly reproached himself for having gone to West Point, leaving her to fight the battle of life alone, and when he hinted at this, and frankly offered to resign and seek some employment that would bring in a large immediate return, she said:

"No, Tom. You must keep on as you have started. This is to be your life-work. You will have only one chance, and you must take advantage of it. We can stand a little privation now for the sake of what will come afterward."

"But I don't want you to stand privation, Mother. It isn't fair that I should have it easy while you work so hard."

"Are you having it easy, Tom?"

She looked at him closely as she asked this.

"Well, the fellows don't call it easy," he admitted.

"I understand," she said smiling. "Now don't

worry about me. I am making enough to live on. You are paying your own way, and a little more, though I wish I could send you some money occasionally."

"I couldn't use it!" he said, with a laugh. "I haven't exhausted my Academy credit yet."

"Well, it won't be very much longer," she went on with a sigh. "The next two years will go past quickly, and then——"

"Then I'll take care of you, Mother!" Tom exclaimed. "Once I graduate, I'll be earning enough to make life easier for you. There won't be a needle or a spool of thread in the house."

"What about mending for you?" she asked, smiling.

"Oh, I'm a pretty fair sewer myself," he laughed. "But, Mother," he asked, as they were on their way to the little cottage, "what was it you mentioned in your letter, about something important to tell me?"

Tom looked searchingly at his mother as they walked up the main street of the town. Nothing had changed much, Tom thought, during his two years' absence. Here and there a new front had been put on to some store, and there were two new moving picture places. But otherwise Chester was about the same.

"What is it, Mother?" Tom asked again, as he noted that she hesitated about answering. "Is

it the old problem—money—father's affairs?"

"Yes, Tom, in a way. You know how the valuable land, now used as an approach to the railroad bridge, passed away from us. I have always thought that there was something wrong about that. I had an idea that it was, in some way, secured against anything that could happen."

"What do you mean by 'secured'?"

"I mean I understood your father to say, shortly before he died so suddenly, that if anything happened to him, that land would yield enough of an income for you and me to live on until you were old enough to look after yourself, and me, too. He always had an idea that it would be very valuable, though whether or not he had an intimation that the railroad was coming through I can not say."

"You say he told you the land was secured?" asked Tom.

"That was the word he used—yes."

"He didn't say how, did he?"

"Not exactly, but I understood he had put it in trust—deeded it, in some way, so that it would eventually come to us—to you and to me."

"Did he ever show you any papers in that connection?"

"No. He was going to, and we had planned to go over the matter together, when he fell ill, and—"

Her voice choked, and she could not proceed for a moment.

Tom's eyes filled with tears as he led his mother into the house. They sat down together, and presently Mrs. Taylor regained control of herself, so that she could go on.

"Why I said anything in my letter," she resumed, "was because of something I found when going over some old papers of your father's. It was a few days ago, and among some useless documents I found a rough draft of a trust deed he had drawn up regarding the railroad property, as I call it."

"To whom was the deed made out?" Tom asked.

"To Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle."

"What!" cried Tom, startled by his mother's answer. "To those—"

"Now don't be rash, son," she advised him. "The land was not actually deeded to these two men. It was only to go to them in trust for you and me. Your father's idea was, as I understand it, that Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle could make a better bargain with the railroad people than we could. So he made this deed in trust."

"And is this how those two—those two—men—" Tom controlled his words by an effort—

"is this how they got the property away from us—through that deed of trust?"

"I don't know, Tom," said Mrs. Taylor simply. "All I have to go by is the rough draft of the deed of trust. Whether your father carried out his idea as outlined in that, I cannot say. The plan was probably a good one, but it failed as far as we are concerned. I mean we have derived no benefit from the land."

"No, but we will, Mother!" Tom exclaimed, vigorously.

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Taylor was startled.

"I mean I am going to see Mr. Doolittle, and ask him about this deed of trust. If he and Captain Hawkesbury held the land in that way they should turn over to us the money they got from the railroad company. It must be a large sum. Why, it's just as if they were the guardians of the land for our benefit."

"Yes, Tom, that is if your father carried out his idea. But I have no means of knowing whether he did or not. I have searched all through his papers, but I found nothing more on the subject. I don't see what we can do, but I thought I had better tell you of it."

"I am very glad you did, Mother," Tom said, quietly.

"I only discovered the draft a few days before

"I wrote to you," Tom's mother said. "But it all seems so useless."

"No, it isn't!" he exclaimed, earnestly. "I'm going to do something."

"Nothing rash, Tom, I hope!" she said, apprehensively.

"No, not exactly that. But I'm going to see Mr. Doolittle, and ask him a thing or two."

Mrs. Taylor was surprised at the change in her son. He was very much more of a man than when he left two years before. He seemed very capable.

This, of course, was due to the West Point training. It tends to make a lad stand on his own feet, for the Academy trains him with the idea of some day having him handle large bodies of men; and to rule over others one must first learn to govern himself.

"Let me see that paper, Mother," Tom said, when they had talked the matter over a little longer.

She gave it to him, and he studied it earnestly. It was, as she had said, a copy, or draft, of a deed of trust, for the valuable land on which one end of the railroad bridge stood.

"I'll see Doolittle about this," Tom decided.

However, he did not carry out his intention that day. He was tired with his trip, and he wanted to be in the best condition when he met

the man who he had reason to suspect was a clever schemer, if not a downright swindler.

Tom spent some time in going about town, renewing acquaintance with his former school chums. He had much to tell them of his life at West Point, and he, in turn, listened to much of interest.

Then, having ascertained from a local lawyer a general idea of how deeds of trust were executed and carried out, Tom called on Mr. Doolittle.

Aaron Doolittle was a local character. In a way he was a sort of Shylock, but he would not have felt complimented had any one called him that, though his knowledge of Shakespeare was limited. Mr. Doolittle had money, and he loaned it out on the best of security at high rates of interest.

Tom found him in his office over the local bank, in which, it was rumored, Mr. Doolittle held a large interest.

"Well, what do you want?" fairly snarled the financier of Tom, as the latter entered. "I haven't any money to lend, if that's what you've come for."

"Money to lend?" repeated Tom, somewhat surprised.

"Yes. That's what I said! If you came here thinking to get enough to keep on with that silly

soldier life you've been leading you can march right out again, the way you came in. You'll get no money from me!"

"Well, I'm not so sure of that," Tom said, more coolly than he felt.

"Hey? What do you mean?" Mr. Doolittle seemed alarmed.

"I'll tell you that later," Tom said significantly, as he felt in his pocket to see if he had the draft of the deed safe. "But just now I'll say I didn't come to borrow any money." Tom emphasized the word "borrow."

"Another thing," he went on. "I don't need money to continue at West Point. I am being paid for staying there."

"Paid! Huh! What's this country coming to, anyhow, when it squanders money on such foolishness?" snorted the crabbed old man.

Tom did not answer that question. It was too big. What he did say was:

"Mr. Doolittle, I have called on you in reference to a deed of trust my father drew shortly before his death, naming you and Captain Hawkesbury as trustees of a certain piece of land—land where the railroad bridge now stands. That land has been sold, and I think the money for it should come to my mother and to me. I have here—"

That was as far as Tom got just then. Mr.

Doolittle fairly leaped from his chair, his face blazing with wrath.

"You—you—" he stammered out. Words failed him for a moment.

"Get out of my office!" he shouted.

"Not until you have answered my question," said Tom, coolly.

"How dare you ask me any questions?"

"How dare I? Why, I think I have a very good right, since you were in charge of some of my father's property."

"Your father's property! He left none! All he did own was swallowed up in debts. He owes me money now, if the truth were known."

"I don't believe that," Tom said, quietly.

"You don't believe it? Well, I'll prove it to you!" fairly shouted the angry man. "That deed of trust! Bah! There never was any! He deeded that property outright to Captain Hawkesbury and me for what he owed us, and it wasn't enough. Now you get out of my office! I won't be insulted by you!"

Tom thought he was the one being insulted, and his looks showed it.

"Now listen to me——" he began, as calmly as he could.

"I won't listen," interrupted the angry man.

"I want you to understand that—but what

Is the use of talking to such a boy as you.
I—I——”

“I think you had better listen, Mr. Doolittle.
I want to——”

“Get out!” stormed Mr. Doolittle. “Don’t
let me hear another word from you! As for that
deed of trust——”

He made a grab for the paper Tom held, but
our hero stepped back, a surprised look on his
face.

CHAPTER XVIII

BACK AT WEST POINT

"JUST a moment, Mr. Doolittle," said our hero, coolly. "Did you want to look at this paper?" and he held the deed of trust, or, rather, the rough draft of it, up so the crabbed old money lender could fix his eyes on it.

"No, I don't want to look at it," was the snarling answer.

"Oh, excuse me. I thought you did," Tom went on. He realized that he had just saved the document from possible destruction, for the old man had certainly made a grab for the paper, and, had he secured it he might have held it to a burning gas-jet near his desk, where he had been melting some sealing wax when Tom came in.

"No, I don't want to see it," Mr. Doolittle went on. "It isn't any good. Your father may have had an idea of putting that land in trust, but he didn't do it, and you can't prove that he did."

This, Tom realized, was his weak point. He

had absolutely no proof that the land was only deeded in trust to Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle. That it was actually deeded to them was brought out at Mr. Taylor's death, for the deed had been put on record, and they had claimed the land and sold it to the railroad company. They claimed that Mr. Taylor had given them the land in payment for money they had advanced to him.

"That paper isn't any good," went on the old money-lender. "It might just as well be thrown away. It has no value."

It was strange then, Tom thought, that Mr. Doolittle should make such an effort to secure it. But he said nothing about that then. Mr. Doolittle appeared to have another sudden wave of anger.

"I haven't any time to waste with you!" he stormed. "You needn't come here bothering me. Now you get out and don't let me see any more of you. If you think that paper's any good why don't you take it to some lawyer? There's plenty of 'em trying to make a living at law," and he chuckled mirthlessly.

Tom folded the document and put it back in his pocket. He realized that it would be of no use to show the paper to a lawyer. What would be the effect of an unexecuted deed of trust that

was not even signed? Tom knew the only thing that would avail him would be the completed document itself, and that would have no effect unless it was dated after the deed that had been put on file—that deed which gave the property to the two men who had sold it.

Much disappointed, Tom went out. He had tried and failed. Well, matters could go on as they were. There was still West Point, and Tom had yet to make an assault on the final heights on top of which lay the coveted diploma. Once he had secured that, he would see what could be done.

Mrs. Taylor did not show much disappointment, however much she may have felt, and there must have been some.

"Never mind, Tom," she said, when he reported to her the result of his call on Mr. Doolittle. "You tried, and that was the best thing to do. We aren't any worse off than we were. We'll get along somehow," she said bravely.

"Yes, but, Mother, I can't bear to have you work so hard!"

"Work is the greatest blessing in this world, Tom," she said with one of her fine smiles. She did not add that it helped her to forget her great loss. But perhaps Tom understood.

Putting aside the memory of the unpleasant in-

terview with Mr. Doolittle, Tom tried to enjoy his furlough. He went out with many of his former friends, and made some new ones. He was in great demand at several little dances gotten up by the High School Alumnae, and he showed some of the girls new steps that he had learned from his cadet chums.

"Say, Tom," remarked Walter Penfield, one day, "I'll be glad when you go back to the Academy."

"Why?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Because the girls talk about nothing but you and your dances. You don't give another fellow a show!"

"Oh, if that's all," said Tom, "come in and I'll teach you a few new wrinkles."

"Good!" cried Walter. "You may stay as long as you like."

But Tom's time was strictly limited and he had to return to West Point the last of August. As was the custom, he and his chums marched up the hill, torn and disheveled as to hats and garments, and had their photographs taken. Then they took up the life where they had left off, some two months before.

Tom had been made a cadet officer, and that, with the advance in class, gave him more privileges than he had had formerly. There was

harder work to do, of course, for the studies were advanced. He had lessons in astronomy, and had to spend long night hours in the observatory taking observations of the stars. He became a fine mathematician, and he fairly dreamed figures.

Building pontoon bridges, working with big guns and mortars, planning entrenchments, taking part in sham battles, riding in the seemingly reckless manner that characterizes West Pointers—these largely made up Tom's life in the second stage of his stay at the Military Academy.

Tom had rather hoped that Captain Hawkesbury would not be at West Point after the furlough, but this was a vain wish, for the old army captain, grimmer and meaner than before, if that were possible, was "right on the job," as Sam expressed it.

Of course, Tom again fell easily into the life with his former chums, and he made some new acquaintances that were pleasant. But overshadowing everything was a suspicion, deep back in Tom's brain, that all was not right in regard to the railroad land. That deed of trust could not be forgotten, though how he was to turn it to advantage Tom could not figure out.

He knew it would be worse than useless to appeal to Captain Hawkesbury. That official cor-

dially disliked him, Tom was sure, and he did not want to have a scene at West Point. So he said nothing, but he resolved to keep his eyes open.

Of Clarence Hawkesbury, Tom saw little. If the rich youth made another effort to enter West Point, Tom was not aware of it. He did see Clarence once or twice, the latter coming to some affairs given by the upper classmen. But Clarence took no notice of Tom.

Not that this worried our hero any. He was only too glad not to come in contact with the bully, for he wanted no more scenes like the one that had preceded the motor boat accident.

Tom wished he had a chance to ascertain what went on between Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle. He wondered if the two corresponded, and whether the old army officer had been informed of Tom's visit to the money-lender. But of course there was no way of finding this out. Tom could not play the spy in that fashion, and he seldom had a chance, now, to visit the captain's quarters.

Occasionally he was sent there, in the course of his duties, or to receive some reprimand for a real or fancied breach of the rules. But Captain Hawkesbury left no more papers or letters lying about. Perhaps he was aware that Tom was eager to get some sort of evidence.

Among the pleasures now allowed Tom and his chums since they had graduated into a higher class was that of riding out on the public roads on Wednesdays and Saturdays. They had all become expert horsemen, and took delight in their steeds.

The pleasures of riding by themselves on the public road were rather limited by the injunction that no one must dismount unless it was necessary, and they could not go off the main roads. But, of course, the construction placed on the word "necessary" in regard to dismounting, was capable of extended application. Tom and his chums managed to have good times.

Occasionally they met Captain Hawkesbury on these rides. He only saluted them stiffly, and passed on, hardly giving Tom a glance.

"I suppose he thinks Clarence ought to be in my place," Tom said to Sam.

"Let him take it out in supposing then," was the rejoinder. "That can't hurt you."

"No, but if he thinks we get off the horses now and then for—well, say a little rest, he'd be the first one to report it."

"That's right," said Harry. "Say, we'll have to watch him. And if we ever think he's on to our game we'll get ahead of him by reporting ourselves first."

"Sure!" agreed Tom.

There was a book kept in the guardhouse and in this volume the cadets who were allowed the riding privileges were required to register their departure and arrival. If the cadets chose they could also note, or report, any of their own infractions of the rules against dismounting without sufficient cause.

CHAPTER XIX

UNHORSED

"LETTER for you, Tom," announced Sam one day, as his chum came in. "From home, I guess," for Tom had told his chums the name of his home town, and it was plainly to be observed in the postmark.

"That's good!" Tom said, as he took the envelope. "Yes, it's from mother," he added, as he recognized the dear, familiar handwriting—a handwriting cramped of late, Tom thought, by too much sewing.

"I wonder if I'll ever be able to help her, and relieve her of that hateful work," he thought, as he tore the covering off the epistle. "It sure is a long time to wait—two years more, and then four more before I'll really be earning anything worth while. Oh, why can't I get hold of that railroad land?"

Tom's self-asked question was accented in his

mind a moment later by what he read in his mother's letter.

"I wonder if it is possible, Tom, for you to send me a little money? I know you spoke of being paid a salary, and that it was held to accumulate for you. You said you would not need it all, and as I am a little pressed for cash just now, and as the sewing is falling off a little, I thought perhaps the authorities would give you some of what is rightfully yours."

"Great Scott!" cried Tom, aloud, before he thought of what he was saying.

"No bad news, I hope, old man! is there?" asked Sam.

"No—er—that is not exactly—no," Tom stammered. "It's just a little matter. I dare say it will be all right."

Though he tried to speak calmly, Tom's mind was in a tumult. He hardly knew what to do, and for a moment he was tempted to lay the whole matter before Sam; but a natural delicacy stopped him.

Sam was wealthy, Tom knew, and he felt that as soon as money was mentioned his chum would offer to get him as much as was needed.

"I'll try to get what is my own first," Tom decided. "It isn't much, but it will help mother out. Hang it all! Why can't I earn money? Or why

can't I get what I believe is rightfully ours. I'm going to do something!"

Just what he was going to do Tom did not know. He could not decide so suddenly. Slowly he folded the letter from his mother, and placed it in his pocket. Sam watched his chum, covertly, and wished he could aid him.

"I'm pretty sure that was bad news Tom got," reflected Sam, when his chum had gone out. "And it must have been about money, for if it was a death, or anything like that, he'd have been willing enough to tell. I wish he would tell me. I'd lend him all he needs. But he's too proud to ask, and I can't offer, for that might hurt his feelings. Well, I'll wait a bit and see what turns up."

Matters were rapidly shaping themselves for the upturn, but neither Tom nor Sam knew this.

Our hero walked out to think alone for a time. He wondered if the plan his mother suggested were feasible. He resolved to find out, and began making some judicious inquiries.

The answers Tom received told him that it would be better not to ask for this money just at present for certain reasons that need not be detailed.

"One thing I am going to do though, is to tackle old Hawkesbury!" Tom decided. "It's time I did, and I wish I had done so as soon as I came back with that copy of the trust deed. Doo-

little must have written and told him what I said, and maybe the captain is wondering why I haven't been to him before. Probably he's all primed and ready for me, and will unlimber with all his guns, but I can't help that. I've got to do something for my mother. I can't have her suffer!"

Tom had a bitter feeling in his heart against the old army officer, but he endeavored to keep it down, and remain cool as he planned the interview.

He saw Captain Hawkesbury that afternoon, having received permission from his immediate superior to make the visit.

"Come in!" called the captain sharply as Tom knocked.

Tom entered, trying to calm the rapid beating of his heart. Buttoned under his closely-fitting coat was the rough draft of the trust deed. Tom expected to use it.

"Well, what do you want?" was the not very pleasant greeting of Captain Hawkesbury.

"A few moments' conversation with you, sir," Tom answered. The captain did not ask him to sit down, but remained seated at his own desk, looking at Tom with sharp eyes, in which our hero fancied he could detect a gleam of hate.

"I haven't much time," said the military man.

"Is it something in regard to your duties here?"

"No, it is something personal."

"I have nothing to do with you, personally!" was the frigid answer.

"There was a time when you were glad to have something to do with us," went on Tom, boldly. "When father—"

"That's enough!" exclaimed Captain Hawkesbury, sharply. "You need not bring up the past. I was very much disappointed in your father. He made a failure, and I and some of his friends were hard put to make matters come out right for the estate."

"I don't believe that!" cried Tom, stung by the cruel words.

"What! Do you mean to tell me that I am not speaking the truth?" Captain Hawkesbury almost leaped from his chair.

"I don't mean anything of the sort," went on Tom, resolved to stake everything now. "I think you and Mr. Doolittle were mistaken about my father, and that there is a misunderstanding somewhere. Perhaps this will help to clear it up," and Tom suddenly produced the draft of the deed. Caution for the moment left him, and he tossed the document on the desk in front of the angry captain.

"Eh! What's this? What's this?" exclaimed the officer, putting on his glasses and taking up the paper. "What is this to me?"

"It is a copy of a deed of trust, drawn by my

father, naming you and Mr. Doolittle as trustees of the property that was bought by the railroad for their bridge approach," Tom said, speaking rapidly. "It is only a copy, of course, and was never executed. What I want to know is whether any such paper was ever legally drawn up, and whether or not my mother and I can get any money from that land. We need it—she needs it—very much."

Tom was pleading now. He had put his pride behind him.

"Certainly not! Certainly not!" cried Captain Hawkesbury, fairly spluttering. "How dare you come to me with such a question? That land Mr. Doolittle and I took for some of the money your father owed us. It barely sufficed. There was not a dollar left. Something for you? Indeed not! If I had what was right you would be paying me now. But I will let that pass. I am surprised at your impudence in coming to me with such a suggestion.

"This document is worthless—utterly worthless. I never saw it before, and certainly there is none like it on file. It is of no value!"

Saying which Captain Hawkesbury tore the copy of the trust deed into several pieces, and threw them into the waste-paper basket.

"Stop!" cried Tom. "That paper is mine!"

He sprang forward, but was too late.

"What, would you raise your hand to me?" fairly shouted the captain. "This is insubordination, sir! I could order you under arrest for that!"

Tom drew back. He could not afford to have his career at West Point spoiled.

"But that paper! It was mine. You had no right to destroy it!" he said.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" exclaimed the old army officer with a frown. "Leave my room this instant. I destroyed that paper because it had my name on it and I will not have you going around showing it to every one and repeating a silly, baseless story. I had a right to destroy it as one of the men involved in your father's affairs. Now go!"

He pointed to the door.

Tom hesitated. He might create a scene, raise a disturbance and carry the matter to the superintendent. Tom did not think the part Captain Hawkesbury had played in his father's estate gave him a right to thus summarily destroy any document he pleased.

But Tom reflected quickly. Captain Hawkesbury, who had a certain power, might make matters appear so that Tom would seem to be in the wrong. Tom might even be dismissed. He could not afford to suffer that.

"And, after all," Tom reflected, "the paper

isn't of any value. It isn't as if it were the real deed. I guess I'd better let the matter drop. But he is an insufferable cad! I—I'd like to—fight him!"

Tom felt a wild rage in his heart, which was natural enough under the circumstances. He swallowed a lump in his throat, looked unfalteringly into the eyes of the old army officer, and, saluting stiffly, turned and went out.

Tom fancied Captain Hawkesbury breathed a sigh of relief. Was it fancy?

Tom had staked his little all, and he had, apparently, lost. What would be the next move?

Tom's immediate need was to get money for his mother, and this problem was unexpectedly solved for him. His chum, Sam, had guessed right, and, making bold, urged Tom to tell the truth.

"Look here old man," he said, brusksly but very kindly, "won't you let me help you out? I think I've guessed."

Then Tom told the story, with the result that Sam's father advanced enough on some rather poor securities Tom's mother held to enable the widow to make ends meet. The securities could not be negotiated save by some one in Mr. Leland's line of business, but he said he was really running no financial risk. So that matter was settled for the time being.

As to the trust deed, Tom had given up hope about that.

The work at West Point went on, Tom progressing rapidly. He enjoyed, most of all, the horsemanship, at which he was among the most expert. That being so, it was difficult to account for what occurred one day.

The battalion to which Tom was attached was engaged in a sham battle, and there was some wild riding. Tom held his own, however, until toward the close. He was riding alone when suddenly Captain Hawkesbury, on a mettlesome steed, dashed out from the line of officers. At first it seemed as though he had come out to speak to Tom, and the latter drew rein.

"Go on! Go on!" shouted the captain. "Don't stop in my way!"

Tom was confused. His horse became a little unmanageable, and as Captain Hawkesbury came on at top speed there was a collision between them. Tom was unhorsed and fell heavily. He felt a sharp pain in his head, his eyes saw nothing but blackness, and then he lay unconscious, dimly hearing, as the last sound, the gallop of horses' hoofs as his companions rode toward him.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE HOSPITAL

TOM seemed to himself to come back from some remote place with a wrench that shook his whole body. As he said afterward it was like falling through some vast space, bringing up with a jerk. He seemed to be floating in space one minute, and the next he awoke with a start to find himself in bed. A glance around told him it was the hospital attached to the Academy. And, thus recognizing it, Tom was spared the necessity of asking:

“Where am I?”

What he did ask when he saw an orderly coming toward him was:

“What happened? Am I badly hurt?”

“Nothing much to speak of, unless something develops internally later, so the doctor says. You’re to keep quiet, Mr. Taylor,” the man went on. “The doctor will be here pretty soon. He left word he was to be called as soon as you became conscious.”

"Well, I'm conscious all right," Tom said, trying to smile. His head had been aching badly, but the pain had somewhat stopped now. Gingerly he moved an arm, a leg, one of his hands and then the other. All his limbs seemed to be still attached to him, but he was sore and stiff, and ached in every joint and muscle.

"Well, how goes it, Mr. Taylor?" asked the doctor, as he came and stood smiling beside Tom's bed.

"Pretty well, doctor."

"That's good. We'll have you around again soon."

"Just what happened?" asked Tom. He had a memory of Captain Hawkesbury's horse crashing into him, and Tom thought he himself had been in danger of being crushed under the animal. But evidently that had not happened.

"There was a collision between you and Captain Hawkesbury," went on the physician. "Both your mounts seemed to get a little beyond you, and that was strange, for the captain boasts of being able to manage any kind of horse.

"That isn't saying you mismanaged yours, though," the medical man went on. "I was looking at the drill, and I want to say you got out of what looked as if it was going to be a bad accident—you got out of it very nicely. You had a hard fall, and received a glancing blow on the

head from one of the horse's feet. But aside from the shock and the bruises you're all right and I think you'll be out in about a week."

"A week!" gasped Tom.

"Oh, that isn't long. And most of you gentlemen would accept a week here very gladly."

Tom smiled.

He realized that being in the hospital relieved him from the dull routine—that he need not jump up at reveille and could take it easy in many ways.

Still, though there were certain advantages about being in the hospital while in no great danger, there were disadvantages in Tom's case. He wanted to be actively doing something to help his mother, or at least to continue an investigation into the matter of the trust deed. He had been thinking hard on that subject and, only that day he had come to a new conclusion in the matter. He had decided to appeal to a well-known lawyer, the father of one of his cadet friends. Tom had made up his mind to lay the whole matter before Mr. Blasdell, state that he was unable to pay a fee, but offering, in case any money could be recovered from the captain and Mr. Doolittle, to share it with the attorney. Tom felt sure Mr. Blasdell would take the case on that basis, as young Blasdell, who was in Tom's class, said his father's firm often did that.

"But here I am, on my back, and unable to do

anything," thought Tom, bitterly. "It's just my luck!"

But, while he did not know it, luck was, even then, preparing a big and pleasant surprise for Tom Taylor.

"Now you must take it easy and not fret," went on the doctor. "You were very fortunate to get out of it as you did, very fortunate. I expected to find a couple of broken bones at least, but you young chaps have a happy faculty of falling easy. Feel sleepy?"

"A little," Tom admitted.

"I thought you would. Well, go to sleep. Ring if you want anything. Rest will do you more good than medicine."

Tom closed his eyes and tried to think. The scene of the accident was coming more clearly to him now. He could see the captain riding toward him—he could hear the shouts—the pounding of the horses' hoofs—then he opened his eyes with a start. It was as though he felt the shock of the collision over again.

"Guess I must be getting a case of nerves," Tom said to himself, grimly. "That won't do!"

He tried to turn in bed, but such pains shot through his whole frame that he gave it up, and lay as he was. Finally, due either to the reaction, or to some opiate the doctor had given him, he fell into a heavy slumber.

Tom felt much better when he awakened. The orderly was near him, and asked:

"Do you want anything, Mr. Taylor?"

"Something cool to drink?"

"Yes, sir. The doctor said you might have a bit of iced lemonade, and some fruit—oranges, perhaps?"

"I'll take lemonade. It's night, isn't it?"

"Lights have just been turned on; yes, sir. Some of your friends were in to see you, but the doctor thought it best not to awaken you."

"Who were they?"

"Mr. Leland, Mr. Houston and Mr. Wilson," the orderly replied, consulting a list he had evidently prepared.

Tom wondered whether Captain Hawkesbury would call and inquire after him, but he did not like to ask. After all, he did not much care. There was no love lost between them, and there was no use in pretending. Still, in all decency the captain might have called.

Tom was not as well next day as he had hoped to be, nor did he progress as the doctor evidently expected. The medical man frowned a little, thinking perhaps his patient did not see this sign. But if Tom saw he did not much care. He was too ill.

For the next two days Tom was on the border line between progressing favorably and going

back. Then came the turn in his favor. Tom's fever left him and he was cool, though weak. He began to take an interest in matters, and was allowed to see his chums who called on him. They had called every day, of course, but up to this time, they had not been admitted to the sick-room.

As for Captain Hawkesbury, he probably learned of Tom's condition, but it was not because he inquired.

"It's a mean thing to think, much less to say," mused Tom, as he lay in bed staring up at the ceiling, "but it looks to me as though Captain Hawkesbury is glad I'm laid up. And I think he'd be glad if I was so knocked out that I'd have to withdraw from the Academy. Yes, I'll go farther and say I think he deliberately rode into me so I would get disabled. I don't claim he actually wanted to injure me seriously, but he may have thought a little knocking about would take the starch out of me, and cause me to resign. But I'll not!"

Tom looked out of the window musingly.

"I'm going to stick!" he told himself, firmly, "and I'm going after Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle harder than ever. That's what I'm going to do!"

Tom clenched his fists under the bedclothes—that is he tried to, but gave it up with a wince of

pain, for one of his arms had been badly wrenched.

"Well, how are you feeling, old man?" asked Sam, a little later, as he came in to see his chum.

"Oh, so-so."

"That's good. We all miss you."

"Glad to hear you say so. I'll be around in another week, I'm sure."

"Oh, don't be in a hurry to get well," said Sam with a grin. "If I had a chance in here I'd make it last as long as possible."

Sam looked at the comfortable bed, in the spotlessly spick and span room, glanced at a tray of delicacies at Tom's side, thought of his own strenuous life, and grinned again.

"I sure would draw it out as long as possible," he went on. "No beastly reveille to wake you up mornings."

"Yes, I can lie here and think of you fellows hitting the trail," said Tom. "But it isn't all velvet at that. I'm as sore as a boil."

"Yes, I suppose so. Say, the work is as hard as bullets now. You may well be glad you're out of it."

"I'll only have that much more to make up," Tom said, with a sigh. "I'm going to bone a little while I'm here, though."

Tom's two other chums came in later, and then he fell into a day-sleep, from which he awoke

much refreshed. The orderly approached his bed, saying:

"One of the janitors has been asking for you, Mr. Taylor. He's been here a number of times, but you were engaged or asleep. He's just come again. Will you see him?"

"One of the janitors?" repeated Tom, wonderingly.

"Yes, Flack. He's assigned to the officers' quarters."

"Oh, yes, I know him." Flack was an old soldier who had become crippled from rheumatism, and had been assigned some light tasks about the Academy. Tom had done him a number of slight favors, and the man seemed unusually grateful.

"Let him come up," Tom said, feeling quite touched by this mark of liking on the part of one of the subordinates. Tom had quite forgotten that Flack felt under obligations to him.

"I'll bring him," the orderly said.

Flack came in limping, yet with a trace of his former soldierly uprightness. On his wrinkled face, twisted by the drawing pains of rheumatism, there was a cheery smile.

"My, but I'm sorry to see you in this shape, Mr. Taylor, sir," said the janitor. "Very sorry," and he saluted.

"Oh, it might be worse," Tom said. "Have a chair," and he indicated one near the bed.

"No, I won't stay," Flack answered. "I just came to bring you something." He gave a quick look around, and noting that the orderly had left the room, the janitor pulled a folded paper from his pocket. Tom noted that the document consisted of several torn scraps, pasted together with strips of transparent paper.

"This has your name on it—or at least the name Taylor," Flack went on. "I thought it might be valuable, so I've been saving it for you."

He laid down on the bed in front of Tom a copy of the trust deed, and walked away.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLUE

FOR the moment Tom was so surprised that he did not move. He lay there, looking at the curiously pasted-together document, so strangely restored to him. Flack was on his way out of the room. Then Tom realized he must know more about the matter.

"I say, Flack—wait a moment!" he called after the janitor.

"Yes, sir"

"Just a minute. Come here. Where did you get this?"

Flack did not answer at once. He approached the bed, looked carefully around to see that no one was within hearing, and leaning over, whispered:

"I got it out of his waste-paper basket."

"Whose?" asked Tom, though he knew well enough.

"The man that run you down, Mr. Taylor, sir. I got it out of Captain Hawkesbury's waste-paper basket."

"Oh," said Tom. He hoped the matter was straightforwardly done—sneaking tactics were not tolerated at West Point. Still the document was Tom's own. But after his interview with the old army officer he had been so discouraged about the matter that he had not cared what had become of the trust deed. Now it had come back to him.

"I clean up around Captain Hawkesbury's quarters, Mr. Taylor, sir," went on Flack. "When I was emptying his basket some time back I saw this torn paper drop out. I didn't pay much attention to it until I saw the name Charles Taylor. I thought of you, though that isn't your name; is it—I mean your first name?"

"It's my father's," Tom answered, as he saw where Mr. Taylor's name appeared in the paper.

"Ah, that accounts for it then," the janitor said. "Well, when I saw the name Taylor I looked further and got all the pieces. Then I pasted 'em together. I was going to bring it to you, thinking maybe you had lost it, though I couldn't figure how it got in his basket."

Tom did not think it wise to illuminate the janitor on that point. Flack went on.

"I was going to give it to you before, but I got laid up with the rheumatics, and I didn't want to trust it to any one else. Then you got laid up yourself, Mr. Taylor, sir."

"Yes," Tom assented with a smile, "I'm laid up all right."

"So I brought it as soon as they'd let me see you," concluded the old soldier, "and I hope it'll be of value to you."

"Thank you, very much," Tom answered. "I have no doubt but that it will. I'm obliged to you."

"Don't mention it," Flack said. "Sure you did me enough favors. It's time I paid some of 'em back. He was quite anxious to get it himself," and he jerked his head in the direction of the officers' quarters.

"Who was anxious to get it?" Tom wanted to know.

"Captain Hawkesbury, sir. He come to me the day after I'd taken the basket from his room, and asked to have all his litter brought back. He said he'd mislaid some valuable documents. I didn't let on anything, but I gave him a bag of papers where I had emptied his basket. That wasn't among 'em, though," and he pointed to the pasted deed on Tom's bed.

"I'd taken that out beforehand," Flack said, with a very human wink. "And as it had your name on it before it had Captain Hawkesbury's, I thought you had the best right to it."

"I have," Tom said. "Thank you very much."

He was fired with new energy now. If the docu-

ment was valuable enough to cause the old army officer to make such an effort to get it back, Tom was glad he himself had it again.

"The captain was quite put out when he brought back the papers he'd looked over," went on Flack. "He asked me if I was sure there weren't any more. I gave him all the refuse I had in the cellar, for I only burn the papers once a week. He went over it all, and pretty dusty and dirty he got, too. But he didn't find it. I took good care of that."

"I'm glad you did," Tom replied. "It's quite a complicated matter," he went on. "Captain Hawkesbury is mistaken in thinking this paper is his. It belongs to me."

The young cadet did not want Captain Hawkesbury to stand in too bad a light before the janitor, and that was why he made the qualifying statement he did. There was time enough yet to prove certain points.

Flack went out, leaving Tom in a rather bewildered state of mind. One fact stood out clearly. The document must have suddenly assumed new importance to justify Captain Hawkesbury's making such an effort to regain possession of it. He had torn it up in a fit of anger and thrown it in the basket.

"Evidently he was going to let it stay there," Tom reasoned. "Then something came up that

made him want to get it back. Now what could that have been? And why is this paper of any value?"

Tom looked at it carefully. He knew pretty well the contents of it. The trust deed was of the usual character. The location of the land, on which stood one end of the big railroad bridge, was given in feet, chains, links, and by degrees—in the manner in which all descriptions of property are made, "beginning at a point," and so on.

But, somehow now, the dull details took on a new interest for Tom. The draft of the deed recited how the land was not to be in the possession of Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle, but was to be in their hands to insure a better settlement from the railroad. The proceeds were to be turned over to Mr. Taylor, or his heirs and assigns. At that time, of course, Tom's father was in perfect health, but all deeds and such instruments recite that the property goes to a certain person, and his heirs and assigns.

"Now what gets me," Tom mused as he lay there in bed, "is why the captain wanted this paper so badly after he threw it away. I feel sure he thought as I did, at the time I had the talk with him. He felt that it wasn't worth bothering with and I did also. But I feel differently now."

Tom folded the document and put it under his

pillow. He felt better than at any time since having been brought to the hospital.

"I want to get up and do something!" Tom told himself. And that feeling did more toward hastening his recovery than all the doctor's medicine.

"My! This is an improvement!" exclaimed the medical man, when Tom was found sitting up on the occasion of the first visit after Flack's call. "You look a whole lot better!"

"And I feel a whole lot better!" Tom said, eagerly. "When may I get out of bed, Doctor?"

"Pretty soon now. I guess we've eliminated any possibility of an internal injury. You can get up and walk as soon as it doesn't hurt you too much to move. I expect, though, that you're going to be lame and stiff for some time yet."

Tom was. It was agony to get out of bed for the first time, but he persisted, knowing that the sooner he began to use his muscles and joints the more quickly would they limber up, and lose their soreness and stiffness.

The time came when Tom could leave the hospital and walk about. His chums rejoiced with him. He was not wholly discharged, however, and still kept his hospital bed as his sleeping place.

"But I'll be with you inside of a week," he told

"That's what I want to hear!" his chum exclaimed.

Tom was rather apprehensive about the first meeting with Captain Hawkesbury. He wondered how the old army officer would behave toward him, and if he would make any mention of the missing deed.

It was on the day when the physician first said Tom could leave the hospital for good, and return to his own quarters, that our hero met the captain.

It was while on his way to his own room that Tom saw, coming toward him, the man with whom he had collided. And at the sight of our hero, walking with just the least suspicion of a limp, the face of the old army officer took on a deeper tint of red.

Tom saluted as he passed, but was a little diffident about speaking first.

"Oh, so you're out of the hospital, eh?" the captain said, and there was no kindness, but a sneer in his voice. "The next time you ride try and keep your horse under better control" he said, sharply. "We might have both been seriously hurt. Luckily I know how to take a fall."

He seemed to think only of himself, as if he were the only person concerned. He did not take into consideration the fact that Tom *had* been hurt. There were no chances in his case.

"I could not help it, Captain Hawkesbury," Tom said, firmly. "It was not my fault—together," he added, significantly.

"It was rank carelessness!" was the snapped-out retort.

Then, turning on his heel, the captain marched away, not answering Tom's parting salute. The old army officer was very insulting in tone and manner, but Tom was not going to let that annoy him.

"Welcome home!" exclaimed Sam, as his chum came in. "It's good to see you back again!"

"It's good to be back," Tom replied, with a smile, as they shook hands. "You're all decorated in honor of my return," he went on whimsically, as he glanced at the bare walls of the room.

"Good joke!" laughed Sam. "Oh, I'd have decorated all right, if 'tac' would stand for it. But you know how it is here."

"I sure do!" agreed Tom.

For Tom, matters soon resumed their normal sway at West Point. He had to make up what he had lost in his lessons, but he managed to do this, and soon he was back in the saddle again, literally as well as figuratively, for he was riding once more, though a different steed from the one that had figured in the accident.

All the while Tom was trying to plan how to

find out more about his father's property. He had drawn up a letter to be sent to Mr. Blasdell, the lawyer, but the young cadet was not quite satisfied with his epistle, and was going to re-write it.

He was on his way to call on young Blasdell, to get a few points in this matter, when, as Tom passed the room of Captain Hawkesbury, he saw, standing near the open window of the quarters of the old army officer, Sam Leland. The latter seemed to be looking at a scrap of paper that he had picked up from the ground.

"Hello, Tom!" he exclaimed. "This just came fluttering by, and I picked it up. It's part of a telegram, but the address is torn off, and I don't know to whom it belongs. It's been thrown away, evidently. Take a look."

"A telegram?"

"It looks like it to me. Take a squint at it yourself," added Sam, after a pause.

He passed it to Tom, who saw, in a flash, these words:

"Too bad he knows about draft—sorry you lost track of it. Better come to Garrison at once and consult with me. Will wait for you at same hotel I always stop at."

Tom could not comprehend for a moment,

but when he saw signed to the torn telegram the name Aaron Doolittle, it all came to him in a flash.

"I believe this is the clue I need!" Tom said aloud.

CHAPTER XXII

IN GARRISON

SAM looked at his chum a moment as if wondering whether he had heard aright. Tom continued to stare at the crumpled and torn telegram.

"What's the matter with you, Tom?" his chum asked. "What are you talking about clues for? Been reading some detective stories?"

"No, but this is a clue all right. Where did you get it?"

"Found it right here on the ground. I picked it up—" he paused to look at the open window of Captain Hawkesbury's room. "Why, say!" Sam exclaimed, "it must have come from there!"

"I think so," Tom agreed.

"Wind probably blew it out," went on Sam. "We can toss it back I suppose, though evidently it was intended to be thrown away."

"No, we won't toss it back," Tom said, quietly.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Keep it. Just as I said, I think it's a valuable clue to the puzzle I'm working on," and Tom put the torn paper in his pocket.

"Say, you've got me going!" Sam said. "Elucidate a bit for a fellow."

"I will," promised Tom, "but not here. Come along where we can have a quiet talk. This may be important."

Tom put his chum in possession of all the facts in the case, from the time of his father's death and the property tangle, to the return of the draft of the trust deed by Flack, the janitor.

"And you think Doolittle and Hawkesbury kept for themselves the money they received from the railroad?" asked Sam.

"That's what I believe, though I don't know how I'm going to prove it. However, this telegram may help some."

"How do you think that figures in it?" asked Sam.

"Well, this is only a theory, of course," Tom replied, "but it seems reasonable. Something cropped up after the captain threw away the deed I showed him, that made him want to get it back again. We know how that plan failed.

"Then, evidently, he told Aaron Doolittle about the matter, and Doolittle, too, had reason to want to see that draft of the deed in their own possession. You see he states in his telegram that it is too bad I know about the existence of the paper and he is sorry about its loss. There must be something important back of it all when Doo-

little wants to meet the captain in Garrison, across the river."

"I'm beginning to think you're on the right track, Tom," said Sam.

"Of course, I don't know when this telegram was received," Tom went on, "and it may be that the captain is, even now, in Garrison, talking with Doolittle. If he is I wish I could be there too."

"Captain Hawkesbury isn't in Garrison now," Sam told his chum, "for I saw him, a little while ago, going over to the Com's quarters."

"Well, he may already have had his talk," Tom went on. "If we only knew the date the message was delivered I would know a little better where I was at."

"That ought to be easy," Sam said.

"What ought?"

"Finding out when this message came. We can interview the boy at the office who delivered it."

"That's so. All's fair in a war of this kind, when I'm trying to establish my mother's rights," decided Tom. "We'll see what we can find out."

By judicious inquiries of the delivery lad, they learned that the telegram had come in only a few hours before Sam found the torn scrap.

"That settles it then," Tom said; "he hasn't kept the Garrison appointment yet, and I've got a chance."

"What are you going to do?" his chum asked, eagerly.

"I'm going to try and be in Garrison, at the hotel, when Captain Hawkesbury and Aaron Doolittle have their conference," was the reply. "I'm going to try to hear what they say. It isn't just my usual style of doing things, but it can't be helped."

"No," agreed Sam, "it's fair enough to get evidence that way against men of that character. The only thing is, though, can you make it work?"

"I can try," Tom said.

"It's going to take some pretty good planning," Sam went on. "You'll have to leave here soon after the captain does, and follow him. It's going to be risky."

"Anything is that's worth while."

"I suppose so. Well, I'll help you all I can, of course."

"Thanks, old man. I was hoping you would offer. And I'd like to have you go to Garrison with me in case we get a chance."

"I'll do that, too. Now let's go all over the ground, and see if we've left our flank unguarded anywhere. We've got to make this a sort of ambushed attack at first, until we see how strong the enemy really is. So we'll do a little mental scouting in advance."

"Good!" cried Tom. "Anybody would think,

if they didn't know you, that you knew a little about military matters."

"Wouldn't they!" laughed Sam.

Together they went over the matter point by point, and bit by bit. There was much dependent on chance, of course, but that could not be helped. The success of the whole plan lay in finding out when Captain Hawkesbury went to Garrison to keep the appointment with Aaron Doolittle. Then would come the matter of following him.

"It will be soon, I'm thinking," Tom said. "He wouldn't wait long on such an important matter as that. He may go over this afternoon."

"It will be easy for us if he does," Sam said. "We can get leave of absence more easily now than almost any other time."

"Yes," agreed Tom, who was thinking deeply.

It was not so difficult as it might seem at first glance, to find out when Captain Hawkesbury left the Academy. The goings and comings of the military men, as well as those of the cadets, was governed more or less by rules and regulations. Tom thought he could find out within a few minutes after the captain had left.

To do this he had to get the information from one of the servants employed in the building where the Captain had his quarters. But Tom was not going to stop at a little thing like that at

this stage of the proceedings. Accordingly he made his plan.

"We'd better ask for permission now, to be absent this afternoon in case we want to," suggested Sam. "It's well to provide for the emergency in advance."

"You're right," Tom agreed.

There was no trouble on this score. As members of the third class they were entitled to more privileges than came to the poor "plebes."

"Now about getting over the river," went on Sam, when that much had been done. "How are you going to manage that?"

"We can easily hire a motor boat," Tom declared, "and get one to bring us back."

"Another thing—we don't know at what hotel Doolittle will stop."

"There are only two where he would be likely to stop," Tom said, "and we can try both of those."

"Well, that much is settled. But it isn't going to be so easy to get in a position to hear what they'll talk about."

"I realize that," Tom said, "and, as we can't plan that ahead, we'll just have to trust to luck. Somehow or other I think it's going to be on my side. Things are coming my way. Here is the copy of the deed restored to me, and then you

hand me the telegram that gives me the very clue I want. Yes, I think I'm playing in luck."

"I hope it continues," remarked Sam.

Tom gave up his plan of seeing young Blasdell, at least for the present. Now all depended on the move Captain Hawkesbury would make.

Events happened more quickly than Tom had expected, though he was just as glad they did. Nervous waiting is about the most tiresome thing there is.

Shortly after dinner, when the limited freedom Tom and Sam had secured went into effect, Tom received word that Captain Hawkesbury had left his quarters, in civilian's dress.

"That means he's going!" cried Tom. "Are you with me, Sam?"

"I sure am! We'll go to Garrison right away."

They managed to follow Captain Hawkesbury without being observed. He took a motor boat, evidently one he had arranged for in advance, as it carried no other passengers. When it was part way across the river Tom and Sam engaged another, and after a short run they found themselves in the city where Tom and Clarence had had their affair two years before.

"And now to try the hotels," suggested Sam, as he and his chum started up the street.

"Right you are."

"Maybe he didn't go to any hotel. He may have some friend to visit," continued Sam, struck by a sudden idea.

"I don't think that, Sam. But we have got to take our chances. Come ahead. You know what I said about hotels here." And thus speaking our hero led the way.

The hardest part of their task lay before them. What would be the outcome?

CHAPTER XXIII

DISCOVERED

TOM had remarked to Sam, when discussing the matter of trying to discover what was going on between Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle, that there were at that time only two hotels in Garrison where it was likely the meeting would take place. One hostelry was not far from the dock at which the two cadets landed, and they stopped at this one first.

"Better take a look around," suggested Sam, as they approached the hotel. "The captain might be in the corridor, or outside somewhere, on the lookout for us."

"I don't think he suspects anything," Tom said, "but, at the same time, it is well to be on the watch."

Accordingly they looked carefully up and down the street. There was no sign of the old army officer.

Tom and Sam also glanced cautiously about the corridor as they approached the hotel desk. Just what their plans would be, in case they found Mr. Doolittle stopping there, neither could say.

As Tom had remarked, they might be forced to invent something on the spur of the moment.

"Mr. Doolittle, no, he isn't stopping here," the clerk said, as he nodded to the cadets. He knew where they were from, of course. A single look at their erect carriage and their alert, soldierly manner, told that.

"Then he must be over at the other place," said Tom. He knew the clerk would have no reason for deceiving him, but of course Mr. Doolittle might have requested that his name be kept off the register—at least for a time.

Tom thought of this.

"You know Mr. Doolittle, of Chester?" he asked the man behind the desk.

"Yes, he has stopped here occasionally, but of late I understand he has taken his patronage elsewhere," the clerk said, with a smile. "As a matter of fact, personally, I am not sorry," he went on. "He was, if you'll excuse my saying so—"

He appeared to hesitate, as though he did not want to make a slighting remark in case Tom and his chum were friends of the man in question.

"Oh, go as far as you like," laughed Sam.

"Well, he's a big crank, that's the worst I could say of him," declared the clerk. "He made my life miserable with his complaints and his wants. I'm glad he was wished on some other hotel."

There was no question now as to the clerk's aiding Mr. Doolittle in keeping secret his visit to this hotel. He must be at the other one.

Thanking the clerk for his information, Tom and Sam left to make another call. The second hotel was in the business section of the city, but within walking distance, and the two chums soon found themselves nearing it.

"Go a bit easy," suggested Sam.

"That's right," agreed his chum.

They looked up and down the street. No person resembling Captain Hawkesbury was in sight. Nor could Mr. Doolittle be seen.

"Well, let's make a stab at it," suggested Tom, rather desperately, and they entered.

There was no need to ask the hotel clerk if Mr. Doolittle was a guest. The register was open and swung around facing them, having been left so when a man, who preceded Tom and Sam, put down his name in the book. And there, among the other signatures, was that of Aaron Doolittle.

"He's here, Sam," said Tom, quickly, but in a low voice.

"Is he? That's good. Well, what's the next move?"

"I don't know. I want to think. Let's go to a quiet place and sit down."

The clerk saw the two cadets standing near the

book. He dipped the pen in the ink, and held it out to them suggestively.

"Do you want single rooms, or a double one?" he asked.

"Neither one," answered our hero, with a smile. "We came to see Mr. Doolittle," he added, quickly making up his mind to a certain plan. "Is he in?"

The clerk turned to look at the key rack.

"He's out," he answered. "I remember now, he went out a little while ago."

"Can you tell me where?" Tom pursued. "It's rather important," he added, seeing the clerk hesitate.

"Why, yes, he left word where he could be found," the clerk said. "He stated that he was expecting rather an important telegram, and I am to send it to him. You're not by any chance the telegram, are you?"

"No," answered Tom, smiling, "but I have something important to communicate to Mr. Doolittle." That statement was certainly true.

"You'll find him at Lawyer Royse's office," the clerk said. "It's two blocks up the street, on the other side. Mr. Doolittle went there with Captain Hawkesbury a little while ago."

"Yes, I know," said Tom, quickly. "Thank you. I'll call on him there at once. Come on, Sam," he added.

"What's the game?" his chum asked him in a low voice, as they left the hotel.

"This," replied Tom, rapidly. "They have evidently gone to a lawyer's office to fix up some game. Matters must have developed and be going against them. They're afraid!"

"But what can you do at the lawyer's office?"

"I don't know—I'm not sure. But I know this Mr. Royse by reputation. He stands very high in his profession. I feel sure if Doolittle and the captain asked him to do something that was not right, even though it was strictly legal, he would refuse."

"You mean he wouldn't take their case and try to keep that money away from your mother?"

"That's it. I'm going to appeal to Mr. Royse, after Doolittle and the captain get through, tell him the whole story, and ask him to do the square thing."

"I don't know but that's a good plan, Tom. I'm with you. Come along."

They hurried up the street toward the lawyer's office. As yet they had not seen the captain or Mr. Doolittle, though they realized that either of the two men might have observed them, and be on their guard. But they must take some chances.

"This is the place," Tom said, as they halted in front of an office building. "Now for it."

They mounted the stairs, a directory on the lower floor telling them that the offices of Mr. Royse were on the second story. At the head of the second flight they saw a door, with a ground-glass panel on which was painted the lawyer's name, and the word "Entrance."

"Shall we go in?" asked Sam.

Tom hesitated a moment and then took a desperate resolve.

"Yes," he said, "we'll face 'em both if they're in there. I've got to end this suspense. Let's go in."

They opened the door. To their surprise the room was vacant. There was a litter of papers and dirt on the floor, but not so much as a chair or desk. The room opened into another, and that was equally bare.

"Why—why!" gasped Tom, blankly.

"He's moved out," Sam said. At the same time he picked up from the floor, near the entrance, a small card. On this card it was stated that Mr. Royse had moved his offices up one flight.

"This card was stuck in the door," said Sam. "It fell out. He must have moved up recently. Shall we go up?"

"Yes," said Tom, "I guess we—"

He stopped suddenly. Both he and Sam heard a murmur of voices, and then came one in louder

tones. They both recognized the accent of Captain Hawkesbury.

"Where does that sound come from?" Tom whispered.

Silently Sam pointed to the ceiling. There was a hole, evidently cut for a stove pipe, or for ventilation. The building was an old one. The hole in the ceiling went through the floor in the present offices of the lawyer. It made a perfect sounding device.

As Tom and Sam listened, they could hear plainly all that was said in the room above. Tom recognized the voices of Captain Hawkesbury and Mr. Doolittle. The other voice he judged to be that of the lawyer.

Mr. Doolittle was speaking.

"And so you see," he stated, "we must do something, now that Tom is approaching the age set in the trust deed. Of course Captain Hawkesbury and I realize that it is a ticklish legal proceeding, but we are willing to pay well for what you can do. I will not give up the money. I worked hard enough for it, and if it had not been for me the railroad company never would have bought Taylor's land."

"Yes, and I helped put the deal through," said the captain. "I am going to keep my share from that little whiffet! I'll break him yet! Can you help us out, Mr. Royse? It's too bad I haven't

the draft of that trust deed, but perhaps we can do without it."

"Now let me understand the situation, gentlemen," said the voice of the third speaker, evidently the lawyer.

Tom clapped his hand on Sam's shoulder.

"We've discovered 'em!" he exclaimed exultingly.

CHAPTER XXIV

RESTITUTION

SOFTLY Sam crossed the room and closed the door. This left him and Tom alone and unobserved in the vacant offices formerly occupied by Mr. Royse. The closing of the door also enabled them to hear more plainly, as it shut out noises from the street.

"Just state your case, Mr. Doolittle," said the lawyer. "And be as brief as possible, as I am very busy."

"Well, it's this way," began Mr. Doolittle. He then went into details concerning the business relations he had had with Tom's father. Much of this was new to Tom, but some was an old story. In a way, however, it revealed to him that his father had trusted Mr. Doolittle and Captain Hawkesbury a great deal farther than was prudent. It also revealed the fact that Mr. Taylor had larger business dealings than Tom had suspected.

Most of what Mr. Doolittle related was strictly

businesslike—sharp practice, perhaps, but nothing criminal in it. Tom waited anxiously for some reference to the railroad land—that on which stood one end of the big bridge.

Presently Mr. Doolittle, with Captain Hawkesbury putting in a word or two, came to that. It was a complicated transaction. Mr. Taylor did owe some money to the two conspirators, but they could have paid themselves by the sale of a much less valuable piece of property than that along the river where the railroad was sure to come.

"But we thought we had a right to make as much as we could, since we took the risks," Mr. Doolittle said.

"Then, as I understand it," the lawyer put in, "you destroyed the real deed of trust—"

"No, we didn't exactly destroy it," said Captain Hawkesbury, "but we didn't put it on file."

"It's the same thing!" exclaimed the lawyer. "In other words, you converted this property to your own uses."

"We sold it to the railroad," Mr. Doolittle admitted.

"And now, since a complication has arisen, and since the railroad has made a demand on you to show them better authority than you have hitherto shown as owners and sellers of this land, you want me to take your case and help you out of a dilemma; is that it?" asked Mr. Royse.

"That's it," said Mr. Doolittle, eagerly. "We hear you are the best corporation lawyer in these parts, and so the captain and I planned to come to you. I don't mind admitting that the railroad lawyer has made me nervous."

"Will you take the case?" asked Captain Hawkesbury. "We will pay you well. You had better give him a retaining fee now, Mr. Doolittle."

"He had better do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Royse, with unexpected energy.

"Wha—what?" stammered Mr. Doolittle, and though Tom and Sam could only hear through the ventilation opening, and could not see, still they could fancy the look of surprise on the face of the crabbed, wealthy man. "Won't you take a retaining fee? It's usual."

"Not with me—in a case like this."

"You mean you don't want a retaining fee?" asked Captain Hawkesbury.

"I mean I don't want your case!" exclaimed the lawyer. "I would not handle such a case! It is little—if anything—short of criminal!"

"Be careful!" blurted out the captain.

"It is you who had better be careful," said the lawyer. "I don't want your case—no decent member of the bar would. In fact I am not sure but what I ought to proceed against you."

"Don't you dare!" cried Mr. Doolittle.

"Oh, I'm not afraid," was the retort. "The only question is about getting the evidence against you. If I knew this young Tom Taylor—"

"You're going to know him, and very soon," said Tom in a whisper to his chum, as, with a grim smile on his face, he started toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Sam asked.

"Up there to face them," was the answer.

"It is nothing short of taking the money the railroad company paid for the land, and using it yourselves," the lawyer went on. "The money should go to Mr. Taylor's widow and his son. If I knew him—"

"Don't you dare proceed against us!" cried Mr. Doolittle. "If you try to make use of the information we gave you I'll have you disbarred. You don't dare!"

"Oh, yes I do dare," was the calm assurance. "In fact I have just made up my mind that I will endeavor to find this young man and his mother, and see what I can do to make restitution to them. I feel that I would be concealing a crime if I did not. I wish I could see this Tom Taylor—"

"You're going to see him!" exclaimed Tom. "Come on, Sam!"

He fairly jumped up the stairs, three at a time, Sam following. At the head of the second flight was a door similar to the one they had first en-

tered. Without knocking, Tom entered. He came at a dramatic moment.

Mr. Doolittle and Captain Hawkesbury had arisen, and were facing the lawyer. Mr. Royse was a big man, and he remained seated. It was easy to see that he was not at all alarmed. Righteous indignation showed in his face. At the entrance of Tom and Sam the two conspirators faced about suddenly.

"You—here?" gasped Mr. Doolittle.

"Tom Taylor!" echoed Captain Hawkesbury. "How dare you leave the Academy?" he demanded, too flustered, evidently, to return the salute which Tom and Sam gave with military precision.

"We have a permit, Captain Hawkesbury," Tom said, calmly. "I beg your pardon, sir," he went on to the lawyer, "but I accidentally overheard you express a wish to see me."

"To see you? I'm afraid I haven't the honor of—"

"I'm Tom Taylor, a cadet at the United States Military Academy," Tom said. "It is my father's land those two men sold to the railroad," and he pointed an accusing finger.

"Here's a copy of the trust deed they spoke of, or, rather, a rough draft of it," he went on, putting on the desk in front of the lawyer the pasted paper that had so strangely come back to him.

"Oh—ah!" said Mr. Royse, seemingly rather at a loss to know what action to take.

"Will you act for me—for my mother?" Tom went on, eagerly. "I can't pay you a big retaining fee, but I understand it is sometimes the practice for lawyers to take cases like this on a contingency fee basis."

"It is done every day," Mr. Royse said. "I shall look into this matter—"

"If you dare take up this case, and proceed against us," fairly shouted Mr. Doolittle, "I'll have you—I'll have you—"

Captain Hawkesbury touched his companion on the arm.

"We had better go to see another lawyer," he suggested.

"I think so myself," said Mr. Royse, dryly, "though I doubt if you can get a reputable one to take up your case. Good afternoon. You will probably hear from me very soon," he added, significantly.

Mr. Doolittle opened his mouth, as though to splutter out some angry words, but Captain Hawkesbury, with a vindictive look at Tom and Sam, led his companion from the room.

"Now, let's get down to business," suggested Mr. Royse, as Tom presented his chum, Sam.

Tom told his story quickly. It fitted in with what he had heard through the ventilating hole,

and he explained to the lawyer how it had come about that the two cadets had followed the conspirators.

"I didn't think, when I moved my office upstairs, that I would get a case like this," said the lawyer. "But I'll do my best for you, Tom. Mind, I don't promise anything, but it looks very much as though your mother would get her rights."

"That's all I want," Tom said. "It will be a big load off my shoulders to know that my mother is provided for. And now what is the next thing to do?"

"You may leave everything to me," said the lawyer. "I will at once start the ball rolling."

"I—I'm not prepared to pay anything—now," Tom faltered.

"I wouldn't ask you to," was the laughing answer. "I turned down one retaining fee this afternoon, so you may know I'm not suffering financially. No, leave everything to me, and I'll communicate with you at West Point."

"And that's the place we'd better be heading for on the double quick, Tom," put in Sam. "If we don't hustle we'll overstay our leave and that may give Captain Hawkesbury a chance to skin us."

"I fancy he won't do much more skinning," said Mr. Royse, significantly. "If I can bring this

matter home to him it will be a bad mark against him."

"It's too bad," Tom said, "but—"

"It's best to have it all come out," the lawyer assured him.

Tom left the pasted copy of the trust deed with Mr. Royse, and the two cadets reached West Point just in time not to be reported. They saw nothing of Captain Hawkesbury, and it became known that night that he had left the Academy on a two days furlough.

"Probably he and Doolittle have gone off to try and stop the exposure," Sam said.

"It looks that way," Tom admitted.

Tom was so excited by what he had just gone through that he did not sleep well that night. Nor did he give the proper attention to his lessons the next day. He made a failure and was given some demerits. Events occurred rapidly during the next few days. Mr. Royse was busy, sending telegrams and letters, having lawyers in other cities look up records, and in communicating with the railroad company.

Captain Hawkesbury returned to West Point glummer than ever, and "as mean as they make 'em," to quote Sam Leland. He seemed to be eagerly looking to catch Tom in some violation of rules, that he might punish him. But Tom refrained from taking part in any pranks during

those perilous times, though several of his chums took chances.

Then came the climax.

Mr. Royse sent Tom a telegram which read:

“Restitution will be made. Railroad company has in trust large sum of money owing on land. This will come to your mother and you. Can also force Doolittle and Hawkesbury to pay back all they wrongfully took. Charges to be preferred against Captain Hawkesbury, of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.”

“Whew!” whistled Tom, as he showed this to Sam. “Things are certainly happening!”

CHAPTER XXV

GRADUATION

CAPTAIN HAWKESBURY did not wait for charges to be preferred against him for his action in keeping from Tom and Mrs. Taylor the money due them. The old army officer had kept secret his part in the transaction a long time, but at last it came out. He resigned as instructor at West Point, and also withdrew from the United States service.

That was the end of Captain Hawkesbury, and his nephew Clarence, too, as far as Tom was concerned. The conspiring captain had made considerable from his association with Mr. Taylor and Mr. Doolittle, and some of his property was legally attached for the benefit of Mrs. Taylor's claim.

Mr. Doolittle was wealthy, aside from the money he had wrongfully obtained from the Taylor estate. He defied Mr. Royse and Tom for a time, but the threat of a legal suit brought him to terms.

Rather than take a chance in that he agreed to pay back all he had taken, with interest. And this, with what money the railroad company had still held back, put Mrs. Taylor in very easy circumstances.

"You won't have to sew any more," Tom wrote to her, "and you can now afford to come to West Point and see me graduate."

For Tom's graduation time was approaching. It must not be imagined that getting restitution was as easy as it sounds. There was much legal work to do, but Mr. Royse attended well to that. It came out that the railroad company had not been altogether satisfied with the land title Mr. Doolittle and Captain Hawkesbury had given them, so they retained a part of the price agreed upon for the bridge approach, until a certain time when the matter should be adjusted.

When that time came, they began to make inquiries as to why their claim was not satisfied. And it was this inquiry that complicated matters, so that they eventually swung the way of Tom and his mother.

"Well, I'm glad old Hawkesbury isn't here any more," said Harry Houston one day as the four chums were strolling about the grounds after drill. "You deserve a vote of thanks, Tom, for getting him out."

"That's right!" chimed in Chad Wilson.

"Oh, I didn't get him out. He got himself out," Tom answered. "But I'm glad, too, that he's gone. We've got some stiff work ahead of us, and he'd only make it all the harder for us."

There was indeed hard work, but it was compensated for when Tom and his chums finally got into the first class—that is they were now beginning their fourth, and final, year at West Point. They now had many more privileges than at first. They could leave camp when they liked, after duty; they had first choice of horses and rooms—in fact they were very superior beings compared to the poor plebes.

Tom's mother, now properly installed in a fine home in Chester, came to see him, and he took her about West Point, from Flirtation Walk to Fort Putnam and Old Fort Clinton—to all the places of interest—so that she enjoyed herself very much. She was very proud of her son, and Tom's chums made much of his mother.

Tom devoted himself diligently to his studies. Civil and military engineering formed a large part, during that last year, and naturally gunnery and ordnance were made much of. Tom had developed into one of the best riders at the Academy, and there were some daring and reckless ones.

It was an inspiring sight to see the first class of seventy cadets charge at top gallop across the gravel plain, sabres flashing in the sun. From a

line near the hedge they would start toward the chapel. Then, when the bugle blew, as they were riding as if to charge an enemy, Tom and his fellow riders would raise their sabres high in the air, and yell "fit to split their throats."

Then would come light artillery drill, with the cannon rattling across the plain to be wheeled into line and fired. The very horses seemed to delight in the excitement and din, and certainly Tom and his fellows enjoyed it.

June was approaching—Graduation June—when Tom would leave West Point, to become a second lieutenant in the regular army. One day in February the gunner at Tom's table made the usual announcement of "One Hundred Days till June." And there was the usual rising to greet the sun. Then came the "One Hundred Nights' Entertainment," a function replete with fun, marking as it does the last cycle before the final exercises. A play was given, Tom taking a girl's part with such effect that he was recalled again and again.

But it was not all fun—that closing of the final year. There was hard mental labor to be done in order to pass the examinations, and Tom had to work hard, as did his chums. Tom was trying for high class honors, and stood a good chance of winning them. Others were content to take what they could get.

Tom made the acquaintance of some charming young ladies, and had many a good time at the hops and other entertainments that marked the graduation period.

There were drills, parades and inspections. In the riding hall each cadet tried to outdo the others in skill and daring; in reckless riding with drawn sabres, cutting at the leather heads on set-up posts; in riding at the rings; in all the usual exploits. Some rode bareback, others leaped hurdles, still others rode two horses at once, standing with one foot on the back of each.

"Well how about it, Tom, old man?" asked Sam, as he met his chum after the last examination. "Get through all right?"

"I hope so. How about you?"

"Oh, I guess I managed to squeeze through. I'm not trying to set a pace, like you."

"Well I don't know that I have set it, Sam," returned Tom.

"Oh, I think you did."

And so it proved, for when the final standings were announced Tom Taylor was second man in his class, first place going to a New York cadet, who was a brilliant student, a first-class athlete and one of the most popular men in his division.

Not that Tom lacked popularity. It was felt, on the part of the cadets at least, that he was responsible for the resignation of Captain Hawkes-

bury, and this had endeared Tom to all, for the old army officer was cordially hated.

When the examinations were over, and Tom and the others realized they had not been "found," which would have meant that they had actually "lost," there was more freedom. There was little to do save plan enjoyments, and these were crowded in to the limit.

Tom was a good dancer, and he met many girl friends of other cadets who were eager to have him for a partner. Certainly Tom, in his natty new uniform, was a partner of whom to be proud.

But all good things have an ending some time, and it was so at West Point.

"Last parade!" announced Sam one day, as he and Tom were dressing themselves for it. "Last parade, old man!"

"Yes," Tom said. "And while there was a time when I thought this would never come, now that it is here I rather wish it wasn't to be."

"Same here. We'll soon cut loose from old West Point."

To the tune "The Dashing White Sergeant," played only on certain occasions, the parade came to an end. Tom and the others marched, with bared heads, to the platform to receive a little farewell talk from the commandant. Again Tom heard, as he had when a plebe, the strains of "Auld Lang Syne," and "Home, Sweet Home."

He felt a choking sensation in his throat. This was the end of what, with all its hardships and drawbacks, had been a wonderful four years. Now he was to go out into the world to show what he could do.

True, there was a place made for him, a place of a sort, but he must depend on himself more than ever now. He would be what he could make himself. But he had had one of the best trainings in the world with which to do it.

Following the little talk by the Commandant, Tom and his fellows of the graduating class reviewed the battalion as it marched past them. Then they went to their barracks to preen for the graduation hop that night. It was another wonderful time for Tom Taylor.

The next morning the diplomas were to be given out by the Secretary of War, while the Academic Board, resplendent in brilliant uniforms, looked on. They were now powerless against the successful cadets, and they seemed to grin cheerfully in acknowledging it.

There was more music, more marching to and fro, more lines of severely straight young soldiers. One by one the graduates went up to the platform, and received the sheepskins which made them commissioned officers in Uncle Sam's army.

"Well, it's all over," said Tom to Sam, as they went to their room for the last time.

"No, it's only just beginning," was the answer. "From now on ought to be the best part of our lives."

"Yes, that's so," Tom said. "Well, it's a heap sight happier for me than when I first came here. I don't have to worry about my mother now."

"No, now that you got hold of the old army officer's secret, things are coming your way," agreed Sam.

The two chums planned to see each other that summer before taking up their new duties.

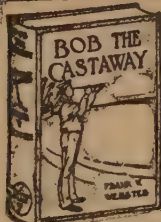
"And now—good-bye, West Point," said Tom, softly, the next day, as he prepared to leave and to meet his mother in Chester. "I hope all the plebes will enjoy their stay as much as I did—after I got over being one."

"So say we all!" echoed Sam. "Good-bye, West Point!"

THE END

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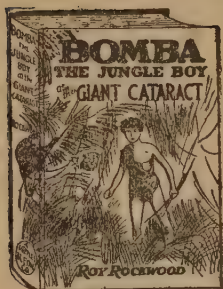
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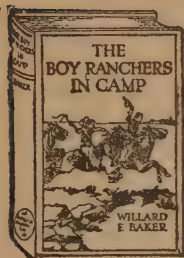
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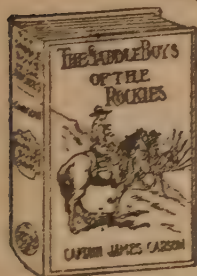
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